# MECHADEMIA

メカデミア

VOLUME

5



## Fanthropologies

FRENCNY LUNNING, EDITOR

# MECHADEMIA 5

*Fanthropologies*



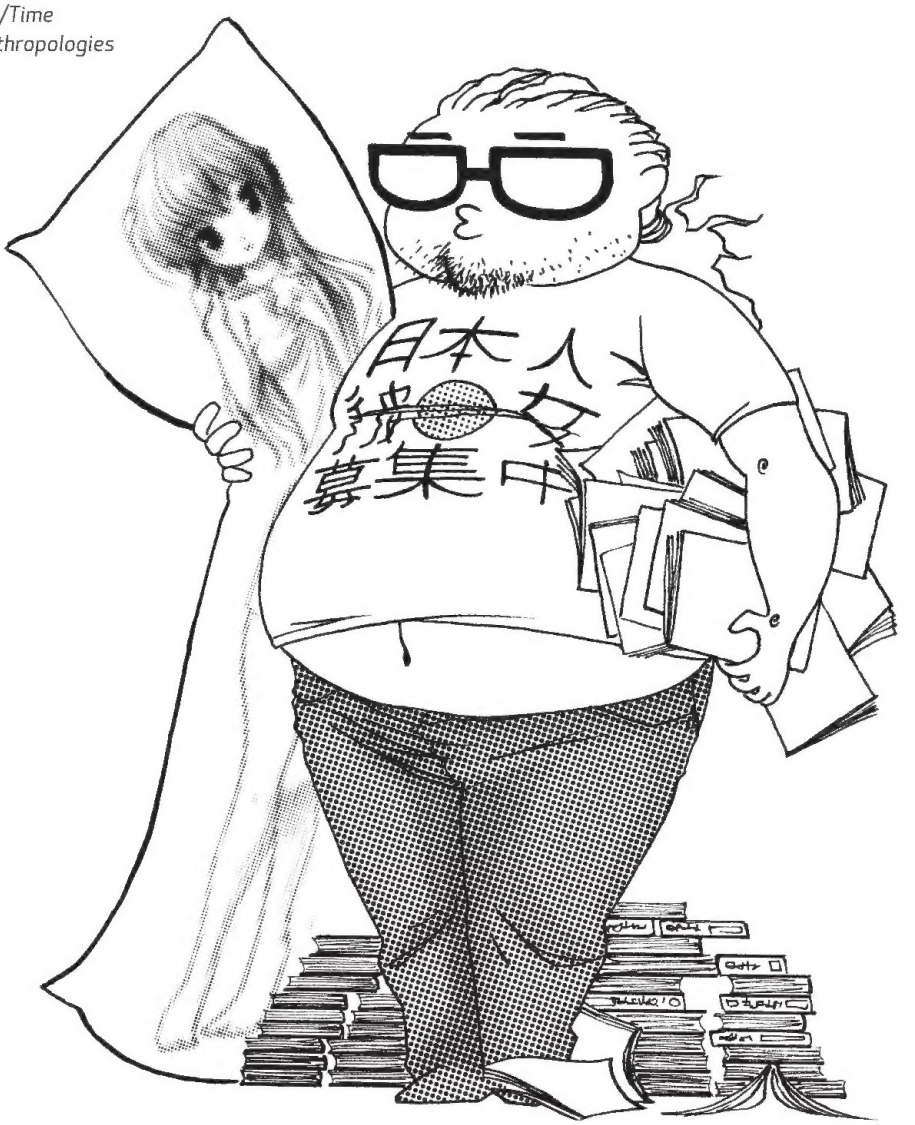
# Mechademia

**An Annual Forum for Anime, Manga, and Fan Arts**

**FRENCHY LUNNING, EDITOR**

*Mechademia* is a series of books published by the University of Minnesota Press devoted to creative and critical work on anime, manga, and the fan arts. Linked through their specific but complex aesthetic, anime, manga, and the fan arts have influenced a wide array of contemporary and historical cultures through design, art, film, and gaming. This series seeks to examine, discuss, theorize, and reveal this unique style through its historic Japanese origins and its ubiquitous global presence manifested in popular and gallery culture. Each book is organized around a particular narrative aspect of anime and manga; these themes are sufficiently provocative and broad in interpretation to allow for creative and insightful investigations of this global artistic phenomenon.

Mechademia 1 *Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga*
Mechademia 2 *Networks of Desire*
Mechademia 3 *Limits of the Human*
Mechademia 4 *War/Time*
Mechademia 5 *Fanthropologies*



MECHADEMIA 5

# *Fanthropologies*

*Frenchy Lunning, Editor*

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS MINNEAPOLIS • LONDON

**http://www.mechademia.org**

Spot illustrations by Barbara Guttman

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**Published by the University of Minnesota Press**
111 Third Avenue South, Suite 290
Minneapolis, MN 55401-2520
http://www.upress.umn.edu

ISSN: 1934-2489
ISBN: 978-0-8166-7387-2

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

The University of Minnesota is an equal-opportunity educator and employer.

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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# Introduction

FRENCHY LUNNING

Recently nothing has inspired more interest and attention in studies of Japanese and global popular culture than fans and fan activities, and the word *otaku* has entered both the popular and scholarly lexicons. But like other commonly used terms, we tend to naturalize words like "fan" and "otaku"—to assume we know all that they denote, connote, include, and exclude. In our need to identify and to find community, we lump common (mis)conceptions into a subject we call otaku. But in truth, we otaku are a vast multiplicity of subjects, practices, and texts that have gathered speed and are now fanning out in massive waves of morphing production and exchange. Constantly innovating, creating, performing, and consuming new iterations of this "style," this family of forms, narratives, and characters is sutured together by the conceptual threads of Art Mecho, the term we use to describe the visual and narrative forms that extend from Japanese anime and manga and that have now vaulted onto the global stage to be transformed over and over again in local sites and citations.

As Thomas LaMarre wrote in this volume's call for papers: "Terms like 'fan' and 'otaku' have been mobilized for a wide range of reasons in a wide variety of discourses, from gender studies to inquiries about technology and sociality. We think that the exploration of fan activities and *otaku* phenomena is crucial to understanding the contemporary world of transnational image and information flows, as well as the transnational formation of concepts and discourses. In keeping with our mission to forge links between different communities of knowledge and to challenge the conventional channels for the flow of information, in *Mechademia* 5 we propose a challenge to the

received understandings of fans. We would like to challenge quasi-anthropological and pseudo-sociological readings in which the identity of 'fan' or 'otaku' is presumed in advance as a fixed object of knowledge." We have all seen these unproductive readings in condescending journalistic works where the identity of "fan" or "otaku" is assumed: the geeky but newsworthy Other. In contrast, the present volume conceives "fanthropologies" not as a pat anthropology of fans but as an exploration of landscapes and subjects that challenge received frameworks and ideas.

The call asked authors to consider the "social and historical construction of fans or otaku as an object of knowledge" from which new insights have emerged. From the many fine essays submitted, we chose several that rise to that challenge. The zones of activity treated in these essays range from manga and anime fansubs and copyright issues to dolls and Rococo style. They include a remarkable photo essay on the emerging art of cosplay photography, a biographical manga of a doll-fan, and an insightful discussion of Akihabara by a scholar disguised as a tour guide disguised in a cosplay costume. The response to our call for papers was so strong that the editors decided to continue the discussion in a follow-up volume, *Mechademia 6: User Enhanced,* to be published in 2011. *Mechademia 6* will present essays focused on alterations fans bring about through the reception of these performances and processes—the sometimes startling changes in landscapes, bodies, and subjectivities that become part of their fan identities.

*Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies* is divided into four sections. The first, "Sites of Transposition," focuses on transformative processes applied to texts, textual subjects, fans, and ideas about fans. The essays in the second section, "Patterns of Consumption," range from Ōtsuka Eiji's influential theory of narrative consumption to Kon Satoshi's narratives about consumption. The third section, "Modes of Circulation," discusses fansubs, scanlations, 2channel, and Akihabara's otaku tours. Finally, "Styles of Intervention," the fourth part, examines forms of militance and resistance (aligned variously along political, economic, national, and gender lines) possible in and through fan studies.

An exciting review section in this volume sparkles with cogent and critical discussions of emerging works, complementing these with a reflexive glance back in a special multipart review of *Evangelion 1.01*. *Mechademia 5* concludes with a fascinating dialogue between associate editor Thomas LaMarre and Patrick W. Galbraith in the トレンド or "Trends" section, a wide-ranging discussion that wraps up the volume by reviewing some of the dominant approaches to fan studies up to now and pointing to its possible and provocative futures.

*Mechademia* is proud to offer this volume, and we dedicate it to the vast, global, and radically diverse community of otaku who are breaking the rules and setting new standards through their innovations in fanfiction, illustration, animation, circulation, and distribution. With the two books of *Mechademia 5* and *Mechademia 6,* we hope to illuminate the discourses and discursive practices that spiral out from anime and manga and proliferate in increasingly dynamic and compelling forms.

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# Sites of Transposition

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MARILYN IVY

# The Art of Cute Little Things: Nara Yoshitomo's Parapolitics

In the beginning was, is, the word: *fan.* What is a fan? I refer to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* which I often do in such moments: it tells us that *fan* comes from *fanatic* (it is surprising how many people don't realize this origin). Whereas the *OED* does list a 1682 precursor ("The Loyal Phans to abuse"), not until the turn of the twentieth century does *fan* emerge as an American transformation of *fanatic,* referring to "a keen and regular supporter of a (professional) sports team" (originally, the *OED* states, baseball). From there it was not a big transformation for *fan* to morph into a "keen follower of a specified hobby or amusement" and thence to indicate "an enthusiast for a particular person or thing."[1]

Then, we might ask, what is a fanatic? The *OED* tells us that as an adjective, *fanatic* meant that which "might result from possession by a deity or demon; frantic, furious"; "Frenzied; mad." Furthermore, the fanatic is "characterized, influenced, or prompted by excessive and mistaken enthusiasm"; she is an "unreasoning enthusiast."[2]

The excessive, the unreasoning, the enthusiastic, and the mistaken: these, then, are some of the semantic dimensions of the fan that haunt its history. In the fan's singular obsession with a mistaken object—one that

somehow inappropriately, and excessively, stands in for healthier, normal object choices—we hear more than a suggestion of the notion of the fetish.[3] The *affect* of the fan—devoted enthusiasm—is here combined with a question mark appended to the *object* of that (inappropriate) enthusiasm. In its indication of the phenomenon of possession, the *OED* reveals how affect and object exchange substance; the body of the fanatic is caught up in a frenzy of identification with the object of his devotion, such that the deity takes over the fanatic's very being. The excessiveness of the fan's enthusiasm is bound to result in a mistaken object of affection; conversely, the very mistakenness of the object is tied to the mistaken enthusiasm of the fan. In either or both cases, the social abnormality of the fan-object relation is staged.

Perhaps nowhere more so than in Japan has the fan figure, with its incarnation in the *otaku,* been pushed to the extremes of mass cultural fascination. The stereotypical otaku figure displays an intense intimacy with mass-mediated fan objects; a highly developed connoisseurship of animated minutiae; a solitary mode of being, yet accompanied by absorptions into virtual sociality (with forms of convening and movement that bespeak new modes of communication); and something akin to fetishism, in which small objects of desire come to stand in for the larger, more totalized sexual relationships that are designated as normal and good.[4] We might think of the otaku figure as embodying the core contradiction of the fan figure in general: big passion, little object (often literalized in the otaku's attraction to and passion for minutely specified elements of aesthetic form—the color of an animated figure's hair, for example, or the cat's ears a character displays: elemental provocations of desire, elements of *moe,* to use the Japanese word).[5]

The otaku-child figure, lost to normal sociality, sexuality, and national–cultural identification, has thus been refunctioned in academic and aesthetic discourses as the most appropriate sign for the strange fate of the Japanese nation-state and its peculiar history: defeated in World War II, bombed atomically (the bomb dropped on Hiroshima was called "Little Boy"), and dominated by the looming, fraternally sinister, yet comforting presence of the United States. To many, the otaku figure has seemed to encapsulate all-too-perfectly the infantilization and impotence of the Japanese nation-state and its mass culture in the wake of Japan's defeat in 1945.[6] But the otaku figure is merely the most publicly available and capitalized-on object of national-cultural anxieties about youth and national futurity. Primarily gendered male, otaku find their mass-cultural counterparts in the objectified persona of *shōjo* (young girl), a word indicating a subject position that is primarily female but can be affectively shared by either gender (shōjo

indicates a psychically open space epitomized by the "adolescent girl" not yet fully appropriated by the socio-sexual order).[7] With their everyday commodity desires for the *kawaii* (cute) and for the tender, whimsical, and romantic affective worlds that embody cuteness, shōjo have become the theoretical counterparts of otaku.

How do the large obsessions of fans and the smallness of ludic objects, cuteness and weirdness, the child and the adult work together in contemporary Japanese art? That is a question I want to explore by looking at the works of Nara Yoshitomo. Nara—acclaimed for his paintings of small, solitary, strange children in various states of anger, abnegation, and abjectness—has become the center of a large international community of fans, many of them young women, who have found in his art and his aesthetic practices expressive means to identify their experiences of advanced capitalist everydayness and the mysteries of psychic maturation. Nara's work explicitly and repetitively thematizes the "child" as an internal formation and as an external object in mass culture and commodity life; his works incorporate a thoroughly disciplined syntax of dreamlike associations, fairytale motifs from European sources, American and Japanese comic-book styles, and naive figurations of young girls and animals (mostly puppies) to create an art that has produced startling effects of identification among many viewers. The resolutely nondigital and handcrafted visual styles of Nara are at the opposite end of the spectrum from the high-gloss digital artworks of Murakami Takashi, Japan's most famous contemporary artist (Nara would be a close second). Yet, as we know, the two artists have collaborated on many works, have had joint exhibitions, shared interviews, and have a long-term working friendship (although it is said that the friendship is no longer viable). There is even a Web site called "Narakami" that sells their products (it assures its readers that Murakami and Nara are "good friends").[8] Murakami has worked to theorize his art and has incorporated Nara's works in his larger theory of Japanese art, which he has termed "Superflat." In engaging "Superflat" visuality and its relationship to the gaze and the figure of the child, we can begin to grasp the fan appeal of Nara's works and their powers of attraction.

THE EXCESSIVENESS OF THE FAN'S ENTHUSIASM IS BOUND TO RESULT IN A MISTAKEN OBJECT OF AFFECTION; CONVERSELY, THE VERY MISTAKENNESS OF THE OBJECT IS TIED TO THE MISTAKEN ENTHUSIASM OF THE FAN. IN EITHER OR BOTH CASES, THE SOCIAL ABNORMALITY OF THE FAN-OBJECT RELATION IS STAGED.

So first, Murakami: he came to international attention with his exhibition entitled "Superflat," held in Japan in 2000 and subsequently staged in the United States in 2001. Murakami's essay "Superflat Manifesto," which opened the catalogue for the exhibitions, presented a distinctive theory of Japanese art. Saturated by the techno-aesthetics of Japanese anime in particular and mass-cultural energies in general, Superflat art is premised on a digitally constituted world, one in which a multiplicity of perspectives and planar surfaces coexist without the privileging of any one perspective or plane.[9]

Superflat connotes much more than the visual, however. For Murakami, it also connotes the resolute flattening of distinctions between popular culture and any form of high culture. And even though Superflat is most closely associated with contemporary postdigital aesthetics, Murakami is invested in theorizing a lineage of Japanese aesthetics, a particular stream of artistic production that has emphasized the movement of the eye across decorative, metamorphosing, playful surfaces. It is an aesthetic that fundamentally overflows and displaces canonical distinctions between high and low art and much else in the name of a singularly imagined Japanese visual and cultural regime. Among those hierarchies that Superflat art displaces—or claims to displace—is the familiar one that includes the adult and the child. It is this Superflat placement of the child that I want to take up here, starting with the very notion of the subject itself and its relationship to vision.

In his important essay entitled "Super Flat Speculation," which functions as a companion essay to Murakami's "Super Flat Manifesto," the philosopher Azuma Hiroki uses the work of Jacques Lacan to theorize the work of the gaze, or the play of gazes, in Superflat aesthetics. As Azuma explains: "I look at you. You look at me. And it is the interaction of our gazes . . . that provides us with the sense that we share the same space, that we occupy a common 'there.'"[10] The creation of this effect is produced through the "use of linear perspective and the interaction of gaze."[11] Azuma then argues that linear perspective—which conjures a sense of reality by having lines of sight converge on a central vanishing point, thus producing a unified sense of space—is a socially constructed perspective that "requires the suppression of the childish sensibility that would see instead an accumulation of independent objects . . . each an image with which to be empathized individually."[12] Again, Azuma: "A child sees something, and in so doing feels desire. But the child has no conception of 'the self looking at something.' Simply put, the child is unaware of the relativity of its own perspective. Lacan understood this state as lacking an *awareness of gaze*." This suppression of the child's unself-conscious, visually polymorphous sensibility, this abandonment of the omnipotent realm of

images, is virtually synonymous with Lacan's notion of castration: "to be castrated is to abandon a direct tie to the image (the direct gratification of desire) and come to recognize one's own gaze. . . . The child may be charmed by images, but the adult is conscious of the gaze."[13] The child must abandon the realm of images, of the omnipotence of its desire, to enter into the (adult) realm of the social. Murakami's work embodies this relationship between the child and vision by his incessant motifs of anime-like eyes throughout his art, eyes that are "signs of eyes," in Azuma's formulation.

A SOLITARY CHILD IS SUSPENDED WITHIN AN INDETERMINATE, MUTED BACKGROUND; THE CHILD IS ALONE AND LONELY, CONCURRENTLY TENDER AND VIOLENT, ADORABLE AND PERVERSE: THIS IS THE ARCHETYPICAL SCENE IN A NARA PAINTING.

Nara Yoshitomo's work embodies a different relationship to the child and to the gaze. A solitary child is suspended within an indeterminate, muted background; the child is alone and lonely, concurrently tender and violent, adorable and perverse: this is the archetypical scene in a Nara painting. Nara's work has been compared to that of Balthus; others see it as evoking outsider art, or children's art itself, in its use of simple lines and deformations.[14] Sketches and drawings, the forms that Nara has consistently valorized (even in his highly finished paintings, the emphasis on drawing remains), have commonly been regarded as preparatory to painting as the *summa* of the artistic process; thus, drawings are canonically considered incomplete, in process, developmental, characteristics that are easily mapped onto the figure of the child in process, an entity ever metamorphosing.[15] Texts and pictures sometimes overlap, with a proliferation of works made up of scrawls on envelopes, scribbles on brown paper, and pages torn from notebooks. These remind one of the illicit drawings of a child at school, transgressive and furtive. They are all resolutely undigital. They all evoke an aesthetics of the fragment. In their fragmentation and in their elevation of drawing, again, they evoke the minor, the occasional, the spontaneous, the misfit (thus Nara's many references, implicit and explicit, to punk rock), and the child: theme, style, and medium recapitulate one another (Figure 1).[16] And with exceptions and elaborations—Nara's work is more diverse than is sometimes acknowledged—his signature characters, the ones that seem to exemplify this aesthetic more than others, are the glaring, large-eyed girl children of his iconic portraits, strange permutations of the round-eyed *über*-cute girls of manga and anime renown.

Do Nara's children lack the gaze of Murakami's anime characters? These children do not have the anime eyes that Murakami produces, the signs of




**FIGURE 1.** Nara Yoshitomo, *Fight It Out*, 2002. Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York.

eyes, as Azuma describes them, within fields of superflattened digital repetition. Yet, the eyes have it in Nara's work. They are a recurrent motif, with a recurrent signature shape: elongated, narrowed, a flattened ellipse (a black half-circle works as an analog of the iris; a smaller olive-colored half-circle operates as the pupil). Here we don't feel so much the pulling of the gaze over

the plane of the work, of the morphing of forms into one another, as the pulling of our gaze toward the eyes of Nara's children. The eyes of these child figures function as repositories of smoldering affect. Most famously, they glare. Sometimes they look sad, other times frustrated. Rarely do they present an unmediated happy face. It is as if Nara reinstates the gaze presumed to be missing in the promiscuous vision of Superflat art, thus providing an uneasy supplement to Murakami's anime-inspired "signs of eyes" (Figure 2).

Following Lacan via Azuma, we might say that Murakami's signature work is in the domain of the imaginary, of a pre-oedipal, unfettered promiscuity of infant vision, while Nara's reinstates the post-oedipal child, the child who has already found itself abandoned within the symbolic order. Nara gives back something that Murakami forecloses. He gives back the lack that lacks in Murakami—and that might signal the ultimately horrific dimension of Murakami's serially repetitive eyes—in the register of loss, figured by the vulnerable yet aggressive children in his work. He locates a range of affects that Murakami does not provide. His characters are epitomes of perverse children, sometimes clutching knives or smoking cigarettes, with oversized heads and narrowed, elongated eyes. Nara's solitary children are somehow outside the social at the same time that they seem to have borne prematurely the burdens of the socio-symbolic order. They upset the developmental temporality that the child must traverse on its road to normalcy (Figure 3).[17]

Their eyes, if not precisely anime-like, do not provide the realist instantiation of the gaze that classic Western portraiture would provide, either (and here the famous example of Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors,* which Lacan discusses—and Azuma takes up—as exemplifying the intersection of gazes constitutive of one-point perspective and the form of subjectivity the results from this perspective). Typically, these child figures don't look directly at the viewer, and when they do look frontally, their eyes don't leave the impression of a reciprocal gaze. Their vision is oblique, fixed on the middle distance; even the objects they often hold fail to fix their gazes. Nara's affective visions course through the figure of the traumatized child (we could say "the castrated subject"), yet the "castrated" space of vision here does not constitute one of perspectivally reciprocal, intersubjective space. Instead, in the obliquity of their regard, the little child figures—glaring out into the distance but not composed to intersect with the gaze of the viewer—seem to reveal a traumatic encounter with the Real; at the same time, their aggression is not directed to any one point of blame or appeal. Their eyes, "looking awry," seem to be fixed on some anamorphic spot, some blot that has caused them to become preternaturally worldly: traumatized children, yet children



**FIGURE 2.** Nara Yoshitomo, *In the Deepest Puddle*, 1995. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.

nevertheless.[18] Their regard—or lack of it—is directed toward the immensity of the socio-symbolic order itself.

Thus, they often float out of or stand in indeterminate space, a kind of creepy (some would say dreamy) pastel background, featureless and encroaching (in person, one can see the impeccably polished finish of the backgrounds of these often enormous paintings). Sometimes the child stands waist deep in a dark puddle of nothingness that extends in every direction to the edges of the painting. This formless surround of the indeterminate becomes the condition for their semi-emergence as subjects, at the same time that it threatens to engulf them. They smoke cigarettes, hold knives (and paintbrushes), and clearly can wound (and are wounded, repeatedly), yet their tough stances



**FIGURE 3.** Nara Yoshitomo, *Too Young to Die*, 2001. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.

and glares rarely attain the status of unalloyed malevolence (although the child in Nara's painting *The Little Judge* comes close) (Figure 4).

We might regard these children as suspended subjects, subjects in formation. To paint a child as a subject is to suspend or stop time at a moment when the body-being is at its most transformative; the child virtually embodies the principle of change and metamorphosis. If paintings of children tend to focus on their innocence and purity, it is precisely to foreground a much-desired transitory perfection and their aesthetic protection from the forces of inevitable growth, and thus the loss of childhood itself. Nara's children are not playing; they are not set within worlds of growth and movement. They are not located within family (certainly not), with friends, with any Other at

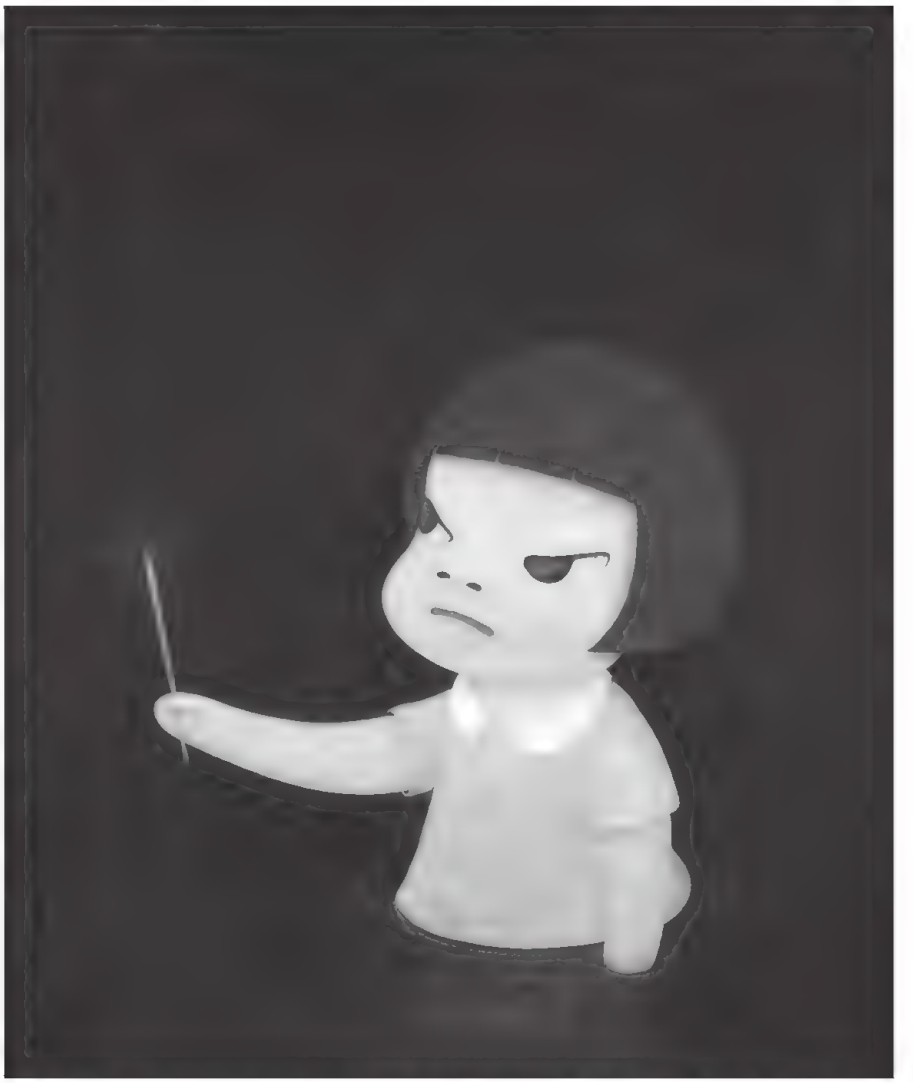


**FIGURE 4.** Nara Yoshitomo, *The Little Judge*, 2001. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.

all. They are resolutely alone, literally conveying the sense of loneliness that Nara constantly references in his writings and interviews.

Nara himself has spoken of the "pure evil" of these children, not without a certain wryness, one must assume. In 2005, my then-seven-year-old daughter accompanied me to Hawaii for the opening of Nara's solo exhibition "Nothing Ever Happens" at The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu. I had been asked to give a lecture on Nara and related themes as part of the exhibition activities, and so my daughter had been introduced to the world of

Nara. Rather than charming or engaging this seven-year-old, Nara's children repelled and annoyed her. Calling them "disgusting children," she produced a surprisingly coherent and impassioned series of reflections on Nara's work, saying that he saw children as evil, that he didn't understand children. She asked me if Nara "hated" children. "Real children aren't like that," she said. "It's kind of insulting to children."

"Don't you think they're cute?" I asked her, leadingly.

"There's nothing cute about them," she insisted.

Rather than lingering on the irony that Nara's child figures completely put off a *real* child (revealing that this art is not produced with children as its intended audience), I want to remark the intensity of the affect that Nara's work evoked in my daughter. When such strong affect is elicited, there's sure to be some kind of (over)identification at work, such that the object becomes the externalized locus of, in this case, negativity. I was not innocent in asking my daughter if she thought his children were cute, because that is the fundamental operative term that is used in assessing Nara's work, both critically and affirmatively. It is perhaps surprising that the minor aesthetic concept of the cute could even provoke such affect in either its positive or negative aspect (so what if it's not cute?). When my daughter denied that there was anything at all cute about Nara's work, she was attempting to fend off the insult to the world of children, her world, that such a perversion of the cute would imply—implying as well that Nara's children were all too cute for comfort.

Here, then, we might want to linger further on the cute—the *kawaii*—itself, as it becomes such a crucial aesthetic term for thinking about Nara's work, and indeed, for much of contemporary art and everyday culture. The origins of *kawaii* had to do with pity or empathy for a small or helpless creature—archetypically, a child or infant. At its inception, then, the notion of the cute is entirely wrapped up in the relationship to the child figure as the epitome of vulnerability and helplessness (and thus *kawaii* is closely linked to the notion of *kawaisō,* or "pitiful").[19] There is no doubt that *kawaii* is gendered feminine, with women and girls linked, as they are in many societies, with children (and, yes, with little animals). From the 1960s on, *kawaii*'s implication of pitifulness and helplessness expanded, under the pressure of mass-cultural proliferations of new categories of taste to what it came to mean in the United States: a positive aesthetic descriptor of things pert, neat, appealing, attractive, and engaging but not heavy, glamorous, massive, or overwhelming. There is always a dimension of vulnerability, smallness, and—indeed—(feminized) childishness attending the *kawaii.*

Yet, of course, "There's nothing cute about them." In a brilliant essay, Sianne Ngai has taken on the cute—as well as the *kawaii,* which in its modern form is close to the English-language notion of cute—in asking how such a commercially elaborated notion came, in an inverse fashion, to influence avant-garde works of art. The differences are, of course, immense: "While the avant-garde is conventionally imagined as sharp and pointy, as hard- or cutting-edge, cute objects have no edge to speak of, usually being soft, round, and deeply associated with the infantile and the feminine."[20] Yet she uncovers unsettling similarities between the resistant ineffectuality of avant-garde art in the midst of capitalized mass culture and the minor aesthetic concept of the cute: the avant-garde text often "thematizes and formally reflects . . . the oscillation between domination and passivity, or cruelty and tenderness, uniquely brought forward by the aesthetic of cuteness."[21] Both the avant-garde work and the cute object as modern phenomena ("cute" really developed as a standard taste concept in mass-cultural society), as articulations with commodity culture, embody an extreme powerlessness that can turn over into its opposite: resistant testimony to the violence of domination. The cute object is, she says, the most "reified or thinglike of things, the most objectified of objects,"[22] and the extremity of that objectification is precisely the fundament of the potential resistance of cuteness.

Commercial cuteness depends on pliability and softness: the cute object "invites physical touching"[23] at the same time that it shows how central anthropomorphism is, such that objects are given faces and, typically, large eyes. For Ngai, the "smaller and less formally articulated or more bloblike the object, the cuter it becomes—in part because smallness and blobbishness suggest greater malleability and thus a greater capacity for being handled."[24] From there, she argues, it's not difficult to see how these "formal" properties of the cute object elicit particular affects. Softness, roundness, squishiness, and simplicity are important, because, as she continues,

> it is crucial to cuteness that its diminutive object has some sort of imposed-upon aspect or mien—that is, that it bears the look of an object not only formed but all too easily *de*-formed under the pressure of the subject's feeling or attitude toward it . . . We can thus start to see how cuteness might provoke ugly or aggressive feelings, as well as the expected tender or maternal ones. For in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is as often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle.[25]

The movement of a child or a toy out of its domain of cuteness and passivity, of innocence under the control of the parental superego, is one of the most disturbing events imaginable. The cute, in its very vulnerability, inevitably entails the uncanny (*bukimi,* as one standard Japanese word used to translate the "uncanny" indicates). In "The 'Uncanny,'" Freud attempted to account for unpleasant affects and untoward effects in the domain of art, ones that couldn't be included within the classic domains of the beautiful or the sublime. His essay took up one such minor aesthetico-affective experience in literature: that of the "uncanny" (*unheimlich*). What is the uncanny, Freud asked, and how are uncanny effects produced in literature (and secondarily, in life)? The core twist of the work, the memorably important key to understanding the essay, lies in the very term itself: *unheimlich*. Freud shows how the *unheimlich*—the uncanny—emerges etymologically from its exact opposite, from the *heimlich*: the intimate, the homely, the private. Through a process of slippage, a word that designates the most homelike and friendly affect turns into its ugly opposite: the weird, the eerie, the decidedly *not* homey. In a doubling that is characteristic of the entire essay on the uncanny, the most uncanny experience of all is having a word turn into its opposite; a word that means everything homelike and intimate becomes *un*homelike (*unheimlich*), alienated and, well, uncanny. The very notion of the *unheimlich* is itself *unheimlich*.

We are now in a position to see even more clearly what Nara's child paintings are staging. His signature paintings of "evil" children are deformations of the cute; they reproduce many of the conventions—big heads, roundness, softness, squishability, wide eyes—but in a version that has been, precisely, squeezed and compressed by the deformational technique of the artist. The modal requirements of the *kawaii* have been pushed past the limits of vulnerable malleability, disclosing the aggressive dimension always implicit in the cutified aesthetic relationship. These works of Nara stage, in turn, the reciprocal resistance of the cute, its "imposed-upon aspect or mien" that reveals the "pressure of the subject's feeling or attitude toward it."[26] The undecidability of the difference between the *kawaii* and the *bukimi* (Is it cute? Is it creepy?) is *itself* uncanny. But an element of pathos strongly inflects these works: the pathos of the cute object already de-formed by the intersubjective encounter with the subject (artist, viewer). That these works should literally take the form of the child—one might say, they virtually *demand* to take the form of the child—only dramatizes this uncanniness, at the same time it discloses the understanding that nothing is more uncanny than the child herself.

This identity of the *kawaii* and the *bukimi,* the cute and the uncanny, has not been lost on Japanese art critics and observers nor on the devoted fans of Nara (although neither the formal dimensions of the "'uncanny" pertaining to cuteness nor the historical relation of the "cute" to the avant-garde have been adequately theorized). What is particularly difficult to grasp, however, is how that conjunction mobilizes such intense fan affection. With affects ranging from tenderness to breathless praise to passionate attachment and beyond, devotees find in Nara's works an intensity of expression that speaks for them, that speaks a shared relationship to their past, and specifically, to their childhood. The art critic Matsui Midori writes that Nara's paintings "recapitulate the child's telepathic sympathy with the phenomenal world"; later in the same essay, she remarks the "special gaze" of the child in Nara's work, as it "penetrates beyond the world she inhabits."[27] The syntax of dreams, unspoken forms of communication (Nara's use of language awaits a study: its display of comic-book captions, its reliance primarily on English but also on Japanese and German, its slyly fractured use of punctuation), and magical forms of identification all become modes of description for Nara critics and fans. The assessments seem to go beyond critical praise and analysis, and take flight into worlds of description that the writers hope can do justice to Nara's children. One wonders how much these lyrical flights of critique are really focused on Nara's works and how much they are really talking about the figure of the child itself and its ineffability. Yet, at the same time, this critical lyricism is pointing to nothing else but the commodified everyday, that place where "nothing ever happens" (the title of one of Nara's solo exhibitions in 2005), and which Nara (along with contemporaries such as novelist Yoshimoto Banana) pulls into the malleable, open world of childhood imagined from afar.[28]

Nara's art works with the intimacies of the cute and the ghastly, but in ways more intimate than Murakami's explosive fusions and bluntly didactic foregrounding of the unmitigated horror of the *kawaii* in its Japanese incarnation. They produce undeniable effects of fan devotion. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than with his groundbreaking exhibition at the Yokohama Museum of Art in 2001 entitled "I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME," which established Nara as a major contemporary artist in Japan. Nara had recently returned to live in Japan after some ten years in Germany, and the exhibition represented a homecoming for him, a return to the land of his childhood. This exhibition explicitly produced the museum as a theater of childhood, and it did so by producing new fans and enticing old ones to participate in what came to be known as Hamapuro (the "Yokohama Project"). The Hamapuro

entailed putting out an open call through the Nara Yoshitomo fan Web site Happy Hour (now defunct) for volunteers each to sew a stuffed doll-toy (what the Japanese call *nuigurumi*) of one of Nara's figures. In a reversal of the commercialized trajectory in which one of Nara's eminently copyable *kyara* ("characters") becomes licensed out to toy companies and made into purchasable plush toys, Nara incorporated his fans in an enterprise that was outside the commodity circuit: make your own hand-sewn Nara plush toy and then donate it for use in the exhibition. Imagined as a way to produce a fan collectivity, as an "action" that would incorporate the energies of fans in the exhibition itself, the Yokohama Project drew on the immense longings and identifications of the Nara fans to share his world. In attempting to move out of the commodity circuit—Nara increasingly uses volunteer labor to erect his museum installations—and to reframe the star–fan relationship as one of gift exchange, Nara works to produce the sensation of a shared emotional and aesthetic community.

What provides the basis for fans' participation in something as elusive as an artist's work? (Nara doesn't have a rock band or baseball team, as of yet). The Yokohama exhibition revealed the outlines of this project. At the entrance of the museum visitors saw—spelled out in huge, hollow, clear acrylic letters—I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME (Figure 5). Massed inside those letters? Hundreds of the stuffed Nara-figures made by his fans—there were some 1,500 figures in total—redefined, in the process, what it means to be a "stuffed toy" (Figure 6). Lined up on shelves below these letters were vintage toys, Nara's own collectibles, not all of them *nuigurumi* but all of them childhood toys. In another section of the museum was installed an enormous, room-spanning mirror with the words YOUR CHILDHOOD imprinted across the middle. And there, on the floor in a most promiscuous pile, were hundreds more fan-made stuffed dolls, heaped in profusion. Walking into the room, visitors confronted their own reflections in a mirror entitled YOUR CHILDHOOD, which reflected as well the sea of stuffed toys piled on the floor (Figure 7).

The art critic Sawaragi Noi thinks through the relationship of the *kawaii* to the *bukimi* (he explicitly remarks a relationship of equation between them) in an essay that compares the tried-and-true coupling of Murakami and Nara to the American one of Jeff Koons and Mike Kelley in the 1980s: Koons with his monstrous pink panther balloons and stainless steel rabbits, the shine and gloss of the commodity form and its sheen of glossy technical achievement contrasted with Mike Kelley and his defaced, restitched, stuffed animals, discarded objects unfit for the "adult" space of the museum.[29] Here, the commentary on art—high/low, museum'd and otherwise—is paralleled



**FIGURE 5.** Nara Yoshitomo, *I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME*, 2001. Installation view at Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama. Photo by Yoshitaka Uchida. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.



**FIGURE 6.** Nara Yoshitomo, *I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME*, 2001. Detail of installation at Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama. Photo by Yoshitaka Uchida. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.



**FIGURE 7.** Nara Yoshitomo, *I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME*, 2001. Detail of installation at Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama. Photo by Yoshitaka Uchida. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.

with the place of childhood objects and of subcultural refuse. Sawaragi is interested in how not only toys but stuffed toys have functioned in aesthetic theory and practice. In thinking, then, about the place of the *nuigurumi* in contemporary art, Sawaragi deftly refers to them as "transitional objects" (*ikō taishō*). What, indeed, are stuffed animals, plush toys, doing for all those two-year-old kids? They are, in the thinking of the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, objects that help the child move away from the Mother by operating as substitutes for the maternal presence. They are loved fiercely, and, in the strongest instances, they never leave the child, even to the point of the disintegration of the soft object itself (one remembers *The Velveteen Rabbit*). At a certain moment, however, they must be overcome, discarded, expelled from the household and from the physical attachment and love of the child, if the child is to transition into the world of the adult, so object-relations analysts contend. Yet what becomes of the discarded transitional object? What happens when one does not give up the transitional object? Then we might find the perpetual child, the one who transfers transition, who defers transition, from one beloved object to the next. (This deferral of transition could describe a dimension of perversity.) Is this description so different from the obsessive otaku fan, the Nara groupie, or even the modal addictive consumer of late capitalism?

What Nara thematized so forcefully in "I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME" was the place of this transitional object, its place as remnant, as refused and as refuse, as leftover and excess. By virtue of this leftover quality, the abandoned *nuigurumi* powerfully embodies and evokes the child as past, and the past *as the child.* What is engaged is the place of the child as *itself* objectified as transitional, commodified in the work of art and imagistically available for purchase in any number of Nara stuffed toys (for adults as well as for children). The child is always and ever *in transition,* and it is only by a process of abandonment that one can provisionally give up the fixated version of childhood to which one clings. In visually fusing YOUR CHILDHOOD with the abandoned *nuigurumi,* visitors were invited to reflect—literally—on an irrevocably past but still potent identification with the child.

For anyone who has been to Japan and visited Buddhist temples, the sight of figures of the bodhisattva Jizō, the protector of pregnant women, children, and the dead, standing over heaps of material objects given in remembrance of deceased loved ones is familiar. Jizō has come to be the patron saint, if you will, of aborted fetuses; women who have had abortions (along with women who have lost a child) often give offerings to Jizō, many of which consist of dolls, toys, stuffed animals, items of clothing: all the material signifiers of

childhood, now given away and alienated as offerings. To see heaps of purposefully abandoned *nuigurumi* is inevitably to evoke the deathly resonances of Jizō offerings.

Nara is from the prefecture of Aomori, where the sacred Mount Osore is known for its yearly summer festival in which blind female spirit mediums call down the dead. Mount Osore is watched over by Jizō, and innumerable small Jizō shrines, almost buried in offerings of children's clothes, toys, and dolls, mark the landscape of the mountaintop. However distantly, this relationship of death, children, and the accumulation of *nuigurumi* must function in the artistic unconscious of Nara Yoshitomo. As such, then, the excess of these dolls, these toys, at the Yokohama exhibition evoked a kind of "horror," according to one critic, a horror connected both to the death of childhood through the abandonment of toys and to the palpable death of actual children evoked by a number of dolls heaped on the floor. The dolls functioned as stand-ins for the dead: dead children, the death of the child's time, the dolls themselves as corpses.[30] As "stranded objects" that can no longer be used to help the child transition into maturity, they evoked a particular melancholy and morbidity.[31]

Yet these stuffed toys were constructed to be exhibited, constructed to be abandoned in this overtly theatrical way. They were not, precisely, the abandoned, dirty "lovie," with button eyes missing and ears ripped off. These were new, handmade dolls—faithfully portraying or evoking Nara's signature figures—that were given up by fans to be exhibited and then used to stage the scenario of the abandoned transitional object. The peculiar nature of these *nuigurumi* is disclosed by the letters from the Hamapuro fans to Nara the artist, many of which were published.[32] The fans referred to each other as "brothers and sisters" (*kyōdai*); what is more, they refer (as did Nara himself) to the dolls (*ningyō*) themselves as brothers and sisters, or alternatively, as their "children" (*ko*). Take this message from Nanao: "First off, I was deeply impressed by how the exhibit was put together . . . Seeing so many brothers and sisters, filled with loving care, I was so happy I could hardly stand it. No matter how many there were and even though there were so many of them, I thought they were all works familiar to me in their innocence. (I had a weird [*fushigi na*] feeling when I saw myself reflected in the mirror.) I thought it was really wonderful that I could participate. When I found my child [*ko*] in the exhibition hall, I thought, 'It really did arrive in good order!' and I started to cry a little."[33] Another one: "When I saw them in photographs, they appeared extremely individualistic taken one by one, but when I actually saw them at the exhibition, they became one work, and it was really moving. I searched

for my sibling [*kyōdai*] with all my heart, and I found one that looked like it was the one. It was great that I could participate in such an awesome [*suteki na*] project." And another: "I was transfixed by forms that exceeded my imagination. Once again it came home to me how amazing Nara-san is. Really, going to look for my sibling was such a joy." Repeatedly, the messages express their appreciation (*kansha*) to Nara, their feelings (*kanjō*), and their happiness at being part of the "project" in which they communed with "brothers and sisters" fictively produced as coparticipants and as intimately produced dolls (which also took on the status of children).

The back jacket of the exhibition catalogue responded to the title I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME by proclaiming "Because, You Never Forget Me. I Never Forget You." If we can move through the oddities of these phrases (including the punctuation), we might imagine (as Sawaragi does) that the subject here, the "I" (*boku*) of the enunciation stands in for the abandoned child within, who had to be given up along with the beloved *nuigurumi* as well as childhood itself. The addressee must be the adult viewer, those who through this exhibition can reencounter the lost land of childhood and the lost child there. The child, the child of the past, the lost child, and the thrown-away transitional object fuse here in a movement of prosopopoeia (the movement of personification, which Ngai says is always at stake with the "cute" object and its relation to its owner or viewer: one thinks of dolls and the ventriloquism of their child owners). The dead child and the abandoned doll are given voice in Nara's titles, and what is creepier than the undead (child, doll) speaking? The voices are from beyond the grave or the trash heap, saying, "I don't forget you" ("Because, You Never Forget Me"). In a reversal of the title of the exhibition—"I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME"—the rejoinder on the back of the catalogue reminds us that there is an "unforgettable" dimension to the relationship of child and transitional object, adult and inner child. Here is where the therapeutic dimension of Nara's exhibition is encountered: not unlike "inner child" therapies in the United States and elsewhere that would enjoin the adult to use finger paints or to draw with the nondominant hand in order to go back to the state of childhood, to recover the missing "inner child," Nara's work solicits viewers to attend to an inner world of affect that had been repressed in an attempt to transit to adulthood.[34]

Sawaragi has argued that along with this potentially therapeutic dimension of Nara's staging for viewers is perhaps a more persuasive interpretation: that in contemporary Japanese consumer society, *everyone* is in thrall to commodity fetishes in the guise of *kawaii mono* (cute things), mass cultural figures, icons, and Internetted experiences, such that the transitional object

NARA DRAWS ON THIS INCHOATE LONELINESS OF THE YOUNG IN RECESSIONARY JAPAN, REFUNCTIONING LONELINESS AS THE BASIS FOR COMMUNITY ITSELF: THE LONELINESS, ONE MIGHT SAY, OF THE SUBJECT WHO HAS GIVEN UP THE TRANSITIONAL OBJECT BUT FINDS ADULTHOOD LACKING.

is never relinquished; the dependency on the object that keeps the Mother near is merely transferred from one form to another, keeping Japanese (or Japanese consumers) in a state of perpetual childhood. Adulthood is indefinitely postponed, and a dimension of unending fetishism and perversity is fundamentally inscribed into everyday life as it is. On this view, Japanese institutional structures of adult order and symbolic force are profoundly complicit in reproducing this system of childishness. As such, most viewers of Nara's exhibition probably did not experience anything like a therapeutic catharsis through the reminders of childhood traumas of abandonment; they merely, as Sawaragi proffers, turned toward Nara's iconic "characters" in a movement of desire and attraction (*kyara moe*), as his works engage the intimate entanglement of iconic "characters" from mass culture and older forms of portraiture.[35]

Yet it is clear that Nara's fans—fans largely drawn from a certain recognizable stratum of shōjo or post-shōjo girls and women—are subjects who do register some sort of cathartic encounter with childhood in viewing his works, and particularly in a form of community that was enabled by the Yokohama Project. Nara himself muses on this fan relationship in an interview:

> In Japan my fans are people who don't often go to galleries and museums. They just like my pictures, I don't really know why. Most of them are teenagers, some in their twenties, and a few in their thirties. In the beginning I was afraid that they were too young to follow my work, but their reaction to it led me to realize that they understand correctly, and deeply, what is expressed in my paintings. They spend no time on the surface of the work. I can verify this from the overwhelming flood of fan letters that I receive. The publisher of my last book enclosed a small readers' survey card to fill out, and whereas in most cases people don't take the trouble to pick up a pen, we received thousands of replies, many of them quite detailed. It meant that the majority felt personally addressed by my work; in Japan there are hardly any kids who haven't experienced the things I have or shared the same feelings.[36]

While Sawaragi believes that Nara's work follows the movement in postmodern Japanese art from an emphasis on the artist and the work of art

to the lure of the *kyara,* Nara instead seems to mediate between an older sense of the artist and a serial logic of *kyara* proliferation (indeed, Nara denies that there is any seriality in his work whatsoever, although an intensive repetition of motifs and forms is obviously at work). His multiple paintings of virtually identical child figures—each one, however, entailing a crucial aesthetic difference—make homely and unhomely the serialized modalities, however enthralling, of *kyara* production. Indeed, Nara personalizes seriality while keeping it recognizable and leaving it open after the fact to mass-cultural recuperation (just look at his plush toys on the market, wherein his figures become "characterized"). His child paintings operate as generative nodes of filiative identification with his fans: they literally operate as children and siblings for fans, and arguably, for Nara. This sense of filiative identification binds his fans into networked affiliations, often notated in the language of kinship.

Nara draws on this inchoate loneliness of the young in recessionary Japan, refunctioning loneliness as the basis for community itself: the loneliness, one might say, of the subject who has given up the transitional object but finds adulthood lacking. What might seem to be an aestheticization of the (potentially) political—the cutification of the raw sentiments of rebellion and dissatisfaction among capitalist youth—is here changed into a version of the politicization of the aesthetic—or at least what I would call a parapoliticization. Nara never calls for overt, public political action as such. Yet his group endeavors produce a mode of politics "beside" public politics; not simply personal, this parapolitics is based on shared affects and affections and generates forms of association and communality difficult to establish in late capitalist Japan.[37] His mobilization of volunteers for his installations, his ongoing contact with his fans, his published diaries, his blogs and writings, his globe-spanning art projects can all be seen to form a parapolitics based on a zero degree of community: the fact that we've all been children.

Nara does not foreground his location primarily within a national frame. His is a traveling practice, shaped by his ten years of life and art in Germany and his world travels and wanderings, travels that have taken him throughout Europe to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, Korea, and beyond. His studio artistic practice has been highly solitary, contrasting sharply with Murakami's factory-like atelier. While undoubtedly shaped by a postwar culture of the *kawaii* in Japan—and in conversation with mass-cultural iconicity in the United States and elsewhere—Nara's work takes on the always-available space of childhood as something generalizable, beyond national-cultural enframements. He uses it as the basis for an expressive,

parapolitical practice—one formed around fans and fan objects as fictive kin, the detraumatization of loss by an aesthetic therapeutics, a refunctioning of the *kawaii* as a staging of the relationship between subject and object, a pacifist stance (Nara has long opposed the war in Iraq, for example), and a devoted attention to the child as the embodiment of the critical potential of the *kawaii*.[38]

Nara's exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York in February and March 2009 centered on two spire-topped miniature houses fit for hobbits, one shingled green and another with an orange cast (could they possibly have been meant to evoke Manhattan's Twin Towers?) (Figure 8). One had to bend down or kneel to see into the interiors, bodily producing the sense of peering into the secret spaces of children. One of the houses, illuminated from within, contained a painting of a round-eyed, button-nosed girl—still staying true to Nara's themes of young girls, but here reprising the kitsch Keane doll look familiar in the United States (or perhaps a Hümmel figurine). On the floor of this elfin structure, we found a pile of stuffed toys: this time—not the carefully hand-sewn Nara figures of "I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME"—but explicitly mass-produced, low-end soft toys (Disney figures, rag dolls, teddy bears, ducks) given to Nara, yet again, by his fans (Figure 9). The other miniature hut evoked nothing so much as a troll's house in the Black Forest (its shingled spire, however, had been lopped off—burned off, if the charred, ragged edge of the roof was any indication). This structure had a tiny desk, outfitted with colored pencils and a completed drawing on its surface. The drawing was of a burning house; on the wall hung another drawing of a girl with Nara's old signature glaring eyes, a house in the background, and the lettered word HEIMWEH ("home pain," "homesickness" in German). It seems that Nara hasn't given up the productive search for home, installing it within increasingly exotic and fairy-tale enclosures, a "home" that is never where it seems to be, in flames at the same time the child burns with the intimate yet foreign kernel of heimweh.

Released in 2007, the documentary *Nara: Nara Yoshitomo to no tabi no kiroku* (officially translated as *Traveling with Yoshitomo Nara*) follows Nara and his entourage throughout the world, revealing the fan passions that accompanied him as he mounted the exhibitions that became part of "A to Z," which again thematizes Nara's repeated attempts to construct a "home" in the midst of never being there. In the documentary, Nara states: "I work with other people a lot now. And unlike before, I don't draw those cynical children. They're still desolate, but they're not as transient. The pictures are a bit deeper now. But it's not an evolution of my paintings as artwork. It's because

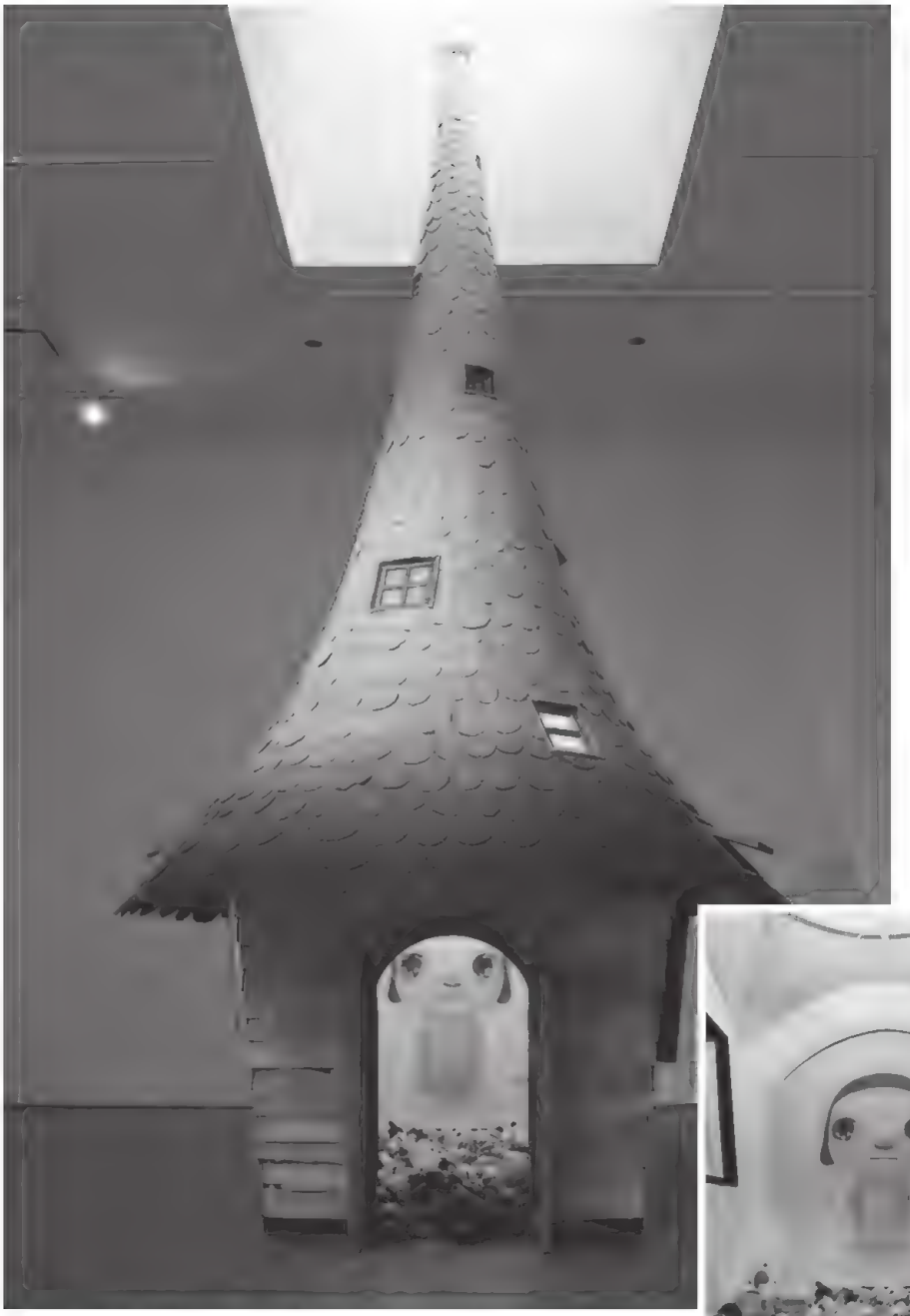


**FIGURE 8.** Nara Yoshitomo, *Not Everything but/Green House*, 2009. Installation view, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery. **FIGURE 9 (RIGHT).** Nara Yoshitomo, *Not Everything but/Green House*, 2009. Detail, installation view, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery.

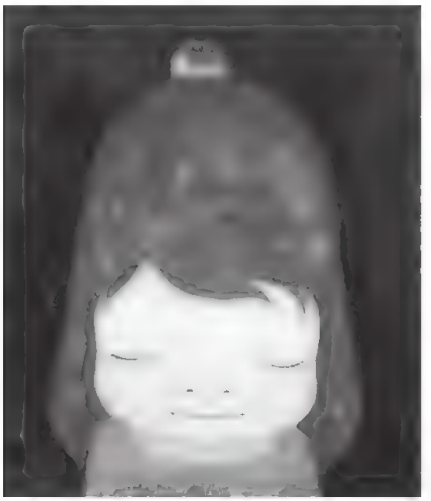


**FIGURE 10.** Nara Yoshitomo, *Home*, 2009. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery.

I learned how to interact with other people."[39] Although those "cynical children" still show up in Nara's drawings, more of his paintings now depict children with eyes that are round and filled with stars, or closed in sleep: children who are transient but not as desolate as before (Figure 10). Nara's art of transitional objects has brought together not only lost children in Japan but elsewhere, forming unexpected solidarities based on a grappling with the *kawaii*, the aesthetic marker for the most reified of objects and the most vulnerable of subjects. Nara has animated fan solidarities around a paradoxically activist art centered on cuteness and its latent capacities to signal a shared realization of the vulnerabilities of young subjecthood in commodity culture. Nara's art, perpetually staging the doubleness of the cute child-object/subject and its abandoned home, transforms the anomie of capitalized life through its animation of the parapolitical powers of fans, with their "unreasoned enthusiasms" for, and as, cute little things.

## Notes

I would like to thank Nara Yoshitomo for allowing me to reproduce images of his works. In addition, I am grateful to Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York (and Eve Wasserman there) and to Tomio Koyama Gallery in Tokyo (and Tomoko Omori there) for their generous assistance in securing permissions and images. Many thanks, also, to Andrea Arai, Tom LaMarre, Christine Yano, Sam and Anne Morse, and Hoon Song.

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "fan."

2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "fanatic."

3. See Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," (1927) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 volumes), trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958): 21:147–58.

4. See Thomas LaMarre, "Otaku Movement," *EnterText* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2004/2005): 151–87, for a discussion of distinctive forms of movement, labor, and encounter enabled by otaku. http://arts.brunel.ac.uk/gate/entertext/4_1/lamarre.pdf

5. On the notion of *moe*, see Azuma Hiroki, *Yūbinteki fuantachi* (Postal anxieties) (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1999); also Marc Steinberg, "*Otaku* Consumption, Superflat Art and the Return to Edo," *Japan Forum* 16, no. 3 (2004): 449–71.

6. The otaku figure as exemplifying Japan's predicament and possibilities in a nation-culture infantilized by American defeat and mass-cultural domination was a critical theme in Murakami Takashi's exhibition, "Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding

Subculture," Japan Society Gallery, New York, April 8–July 24, 2005. For more on the trope of the "little boy" and the place of otaku subculture and the aesthetics of the cute (*kawaii*), see Murakami's essay, "Earth in my Window," in the exhibition catalogue, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 98–149. See also my review of the catalogue: Marilyn Ivy, "*Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 498–502.

7. There have been innumerable essays in English and Japanese considering the import of the shōjo figure and the allied place of the *kawaii*. Crucial to the theorization of shōjo culture are Ōtsuka Eiji's works, including *Shōjo minzokugaku: Seikimatsu no shinwa o tsumugu "miko no matsuei"* (The ethnography of young girls: "descendants of shamanesses" who spin end-of-the-century myths) (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1989). One of the most relevant for any consideration of contemporary Japanese art is Matsui Midori, "Beyond the Pleasure Room to a Chaotic Street: Transformations of Cute Subculture in the Art of the Japanese Nineties," in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture,* ed. Murakami Takashi (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 208–39. John Treat's essays on Yoshimoto Banana are important engagements with shōjo aesthetics and affects in literature and culture. See his "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: Shōjo Culture and the Nostalgic Subject," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 353–87, and "Yoshimoto Banana's Kitchen, or the Cultural Logic of Japanese Consumerism," in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan,* ed. Lisa Skov and Brian Moeran, 274–98 (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press).

8. The Nara-Kami Shop Web site is http://art.wakaba.net/index.htm.

9. For a discussion of the implications of Superflat visuality, see Thomas LaMarre, "The Multiplanar Image," in *Mechademia 1* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 120–43.

10. Azuma Hiroki, "Superflat Speculation," in *Superflat,* ed. Murakami Takashi (Tokyo: Madra Publishing Company, 2000), 141.

11. Ibid., 141.

12. Ibid., 143.

13. Ibid.

14. See Matsui Midori, "A Gaze from Outside: Merits of the Minor in Yoshitomo Nara's Painting," in *Nara Yoshitomo:* I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME (exhibition catalogue) (Yokohama: Tankōsha, 2001), 168–75.

15. See Asano Tarō, "Toward Fragmentation: The Drawing as Form," in *Nara Yoshitomo:* I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME (exhibition catalogue) (Yokohama: Tankōsha, 2001), 161–67. Asano discusses Nara's commitment to drawing in conversation with Adorno's elevation of the essay form; he valorizes both in terms of their aesthetics of fragmentation.

16. See Asano, "Toward Fragmentation," again.

17. Thomas LaMarre has questioned this description of Nara's children as post-oedipal rather than non-oedipal, as Azuma and others might argue. While the discourse on otaku sensibility and the novel forms of desire and sociality that otaku embody might indicate a non-oedipalized formation, Nara's children reveal, it seems to me, a continuing reliance on an oedipal paradigm. Their alternately aggressive and seductive relationship to the adult world, their precocious and oft-angry gazes, and their typical reliance on

prostheses of inscription—whether pen, knife, cigarette, or brush—mark these children as firmly within the symbolic order, with all the oedipal accompaniments thereby entailed. Whether one could ever actually be *post*-oedipal remains an intriguing question (perhaps one is either oedipalized or not, period). Nevertheless, Nara's children—too young and cute for the kind of anger and aggression they so complexly express—rely on a conflictual relationship to the authorizations of the symbolic order that can only be imagined as oedipal, post- or otherwise. In contrast, Murakami's art seem to emerge from beyond the kinds of relationships that Nara's works stage.

18. For an intensive explication of the notion of anamorphosis in Lacan's thought and the ways in which "looking awry" makes visible that which can't be seen directly (objectively), see Slavoj Žižek's *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992).

19. For a lucid discussion of the notion of *kawaii* and its historical transformations, see Shiokawa Kanako, "Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," in *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy,* ed. John A Lent), 93–125 (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1999). See also Sharon Kinsella's discussion in "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan,* ed. Lisa Skov and Brian Moeran, 220–54 (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

20. Sianne Ngai, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," in *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 814.

21. Ibid., 846.

22. Ibid., 834.

23. Ibid., 815.

24. Ibid., 816.

25. Ibid., 816–17.

26. Ibid., 816.

27. Matsui Midori, "A Gaze from Outside: Merits of the Minor in Yoshitomo Nara's Painting," in *Nara Yoshitomo:* I DON'T MIND, IF YOU FORGET ME (exhibition catalogue) (Yokohama: Nara Yoshitomo Exhibition Committee, 2001), 168–75.

28. This feeling of nothing happening, of the tedium of everyday life in contemporary Japan, is theorized by Miyadai Shinji in his *Seikimatsu no sahō: owarinaki nichijō o ikiru chie* (Fin-de-siècle etiquette: wisdom for living an endless everyday) (Tokyo: Media Fakutorii, 1997).

29. Sawaragi Noi, "Nara Yoshitomo no bukimi = kawaii kyarakutaa sekai," (The uncanniness of Nara Yoshitomo = the world of cute characters) in Sawaragi, *[Bakushinchi] no geijutsu* (The art of "ground zero"), 353–71 (Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 2002).

30. See Takichi Shōichirō, "Subete wa horaa ni shūyaku shite iku ka ni mieta: Aomori/reikai/intaanetto" (From here on in, everything seems to intensify in horror: Aomori, the spirit world, the Internet) in *Bijutsu techō* 53 (December 2001): 29–31. I analyze spirit recallings on Mount Osore and the place of Jizō in my book, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

31. Eric Santner uses the notion of transitional objects, derived from Winnicott and others, in his work on postwar Germany. See Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

32. Dozens of comments and notes from fans who had participated in the Hamapuro

were taken from the Happy Hour Web site and printed as "Voices of HamaPuro Brothers & Sisters!!" in *Bijutsu techō* 53 (December 2001): 33–36.

33. Ibid., 33.

34. I have written about the relationship between addiction, missing children, and inner-child therapies in American commodity culture in "Have You Seen Me? Recovering the Inner Child in Late Twentieth-Century America," *Social Text* 37 (Winter 1993): 227–52.

35. Sawaragi, "Nara Yoshitomo no bukimi," 365–67. I would refer the reader back to the registers of childhood that I outlined earlier in this essay; with Sawaragi's argument, we see replicated many of the familiar arguments about the childishness of Japanese society that have been put forth by Western and Japanese critics alike. Sawaragi's writings—along with Azuma Hiroki's, Ōtsuka Eiji's, and others'—have influenced Murakami Takashi's thoughts on the puerility of Japanese society, the society of "little boys" that then became the basis for his "Little Boy" exhibition, with its theorizations of otaku subcultures and the centrality of the *kawaii* for contemporary Japanese art and life.

36. Nara Yoshitomo, "My Superficiality Is Only a Game: A Conversation between Stephan Trescher and Yoshitomo Nara," in Nara, *Lullaby Supermarket*, 103–10 (Nürnberg: Institut für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2002).

37. I realize this use of "parapolitics" is quite to the side of standard uses of the term, which range from theoretical analyses that attempt to think about politics that transcend conventional political forms to perhaps its more common usage in referring to covert or illegal political forms and actions, forms that are often repressed. I aim to use the term literally, to indicate a form of unrecognized politics "existing parallel to, or outside, the sphere of mainstream politics." (*OED*, s.v. "parapolitics"). The formation of fan communities around Nara's art—and Nara—works as a form of (para)political action, one that works to produce forms of solidarity resistant to right-wing politics, the justification of war, and neonationalist movements in Japan (and elsewhere).

38. The historian Miriam Silverberg wrote movingly about Nara's pacifist practice and the critical possibilities in his work. See Miriam Silverberg, "War Responsibility Revisited: Auschwitz in Japan," in *Japan Focus*, http://www.japanfocus.org/-Miriam-Silverberg/2470.

39. See *Nara: Nara Yoshitomo to no tabi no kiroku* (Traveling with Yoshitomo Nara) (Tōhoku Shinsha, 2007).

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BRIAN RUH

# Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s: Localization and Longevity

From the beginning of modern Japanese animation in the United States in the early 1960s, there has been a tension between some of anime's obviously foreign aspects (such as Japanese writing onscreen and a more relaxed attitude toward onscreen violence) and its more easily domesticated characters and plots. American producers were often able to effectively obscure the origins of this imported anime through techniques of selective editing and dubbing. Generally speaking, though, the programs generated through such localization efforts were often very close to the Japanese source material.

Beginning in the late 1970s, American television producers not only adapted anime for U.S. broadcast but began changing the shows around to generate programs that were almost entirely American creations. Such shows took the source animation as a kind of raw material and completely rewrote the stories to make them something unique for presentation to American audiences as well as to television audiences around the world. (U.S. licensors often obtained the non-Asian rights to such shows, and as a consequence the versions distributed to the rest of the Americas and Europe were often redubbed versions of the American alterations rather than translated versions of the Japanese originals.) A program might have the relationships

between characters altered, seemingly unneeded plot information excised to shorten the running time, and be tailored too closely to what the producers thought the audience wanted to see. However, not all attempted Americanizations of anime properties were successful.

At the same time that American television producers were adapting Japanese television shows to meet a growing demand, the Japanese animation industry was undergoing a creative surge of its own. A prime example of this was the film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984, *Kaze no tani no Naushika*), a landmark in the history of Japanese animation. In director Miyazaki Hayao's adaptation of his own manga, he showed how animation can focus attention on real-world problems such as environmental degradation and the need to coexist with other cultures (and even other species) yet still tell an enthralling tale that still looks fresh nearly twenty-five years later. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* would go on to win the 1985 *Kinema Junpō* readers' choice award and set the stage for Miyazaki to establish himself as a commercial and creative powerhouse in Japanese cinema as a whole, not just in the world of animation.

However, the American dub and edit of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind,* named *Warriors of the Wind* (1985), has become infamous in fan circles for the liberties it takes with the Japanese original. Although most would probably acknowledge the necessity of dubbing the film into English for the American market, many had a problem with the fact that *Warriors of the Wind* cut more than twenty minutes from the film's final running time. The general consensus is that the film was a "mutilated,"[1] "wretched,"[2] and "horrendously mangled version"[3] of the Japanese original, which was "subjected to a devastating series of cuts,"[4] and that it "interprets the story of *Nausicaä* just about as accurately as *Demolition Man* redid *Brave New World.*"[5] Toren Smith, who would go on to the form the translation and localization company Studio Proteus, wrote that he was so "horrified by the butchery the insensitive Hollywood company had perpetrated on this finely crafted film" that he began trying to arrange for the translation and publication of the *Nausicaä* manga in order "to save the comics from the same sad fate as the Nausicaa [*sic*] animation."[6] Such vocal opinions often fail to properly explain the exact reason for their anger, though, particularly in the context of the anime industry at the time. As already mentioned, heavy editing and dubbing of anime was common, yet few have raised the kind of ire that *Warriors of the Wind* evokes.[7] This reaction raises the question of what it is about *Warriors of the Wind* that marks it so seriously as a failed transnational media product.

This question raises an important point about the nature of media globalization. Such attitudes assume that for the localization of a foreign media

product to be "successful" it needs to be transparent. That is, it needs to provide the most direct access possible to the foreign original, and anything else is extraneous and unwarranted. However, access to a foreign media product through translation will necessarily be awkward to a greater or lesser degree. As Abé Mark Nornes writes in *Cinema Babel,* "Subtitles and dubs, even at their finest, hold something in common with the rocky translation of the instruction manual for a cheap VCR from China: they are legible, but inescapably foreign."[8] This quest for translational transparency for some, though, may result in opacity for others. Watching a film or television show that has dialogue in a foreign language, depicting foreign customs, and so on may confuse or even alienate a segment of the viewing audience. As Anne Allison points out with regard to the later, live-action *Power Rangers* franchise in the United States, the show replaced the Japanese actors with American teenagers in segments in which they could be seen, with the goal of depicting more ethnic and gender balance.[9] Changing a media product in this way alters how it may be perceived, to make it more acceptable to a domestic audience and hence more profitable to the local producers.

HEAVY EDITING AND DUBBING OF ANIME WAS COMMON, YET FEW HAVE RAISED THE KIND OF IRE THAT *WARRIORS OF THE WIND* EVOKES.

In this essay, I explore how *Warriors of the Wind* has been set apart from other mid-1980s anime imports by its current popular perception as a "failure." I will contrast the film's flaws with two Americanized television franchises that also have their roots in Japanese animation: *Robotech* and *Voltron.* Both television shows took great liberties with their source material and were broadcast over U.S. airwaves at around the same time that *Warriors of the Wind* was released. However, *Robotech* and *Voltron* were successful at the time and have persisted as cultural icons in their own rights, while *Warriors of the Wind* has languished as an example of how not to import Japanese animation.

## ROBOTECH *AND* VOLTRON

Although imports of Japanese animation were popular in the United States in the early to mid-1960s, there were arguably no new programs from Japan shown on major broadcast outlets in the United States from the late 1960s until the late 1970s. (Although, it should be mentioned, localized versions of anime shows were very popular across Europe throughout the 1970s.) One of the biggest influences on the course of anime, and the impetus for the second big wave of anime abroad, was the 1977 release of *Star Wars* (dir. George

IN THE WAKE OF *STAR WARS*, MANY OF THE ANIME THAT WERE IMPORTED INTO OTHER COUNTRIES WERE CLOSELY TIED TO SCIENCE FICTION.

Lucas). The success of *Star Wars* had ramifications for not only how anime was perceived outside of Japan but also for the anime that was produced within Japan. For example, in the late 1970s, Takachiho Haruka authored science fiction space opera stories about a crime-fighting duo known as the Dirty Pair and an intergalactic troubleshooter known as Crusher Joe. These stories would go on to be animated and become staples of U.S. anime fandom in the late 1980s. Takachiho has said, though, that before *Star Wars,* it was difficult to publish science fiction that was not "proper" (in other words, pulpier space opera stories) in Japan. Although there were science fiction stories with elements of space opera in them before *Star Wars,* such stories were nowhere near as popular as they were after.[10]

The influence of *Star Wars* could be felt throughout the anime industry in Japan. Writing about the 1978 anime television series *Captain Future,* Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy assert, "The sci-fi novels of Edmond Hamilton were optioned for anime production in record time when George Lucas mentioned that they were a major inspiration for *Star Wars.*"[11] Star Wars also laid the groundwork for the *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979–80, *Kidō senshi Gandamu,* dir. Tomino Yoshiyuki) franchise, which has been the bedrock of Japanese anime fandom ever since.[12] In the wake of *Star Wars,* many of the anime that were imported into other countries were closely tied to science fiction. Even television shows that were not originally about intergalactic combat were shaped to fit this developing mold. Of particular note in this regard was the television show *Battle of the Planets* (1978), which may have been one of the first programs to try to ride the coattails of *Star Wars* in the United States. The show was the brainchild of Sandy Frank, who had begun packaging television shows for the U.S. syndication market in the mid-1960s. In their book about the show, Jason Hofus and George Khoury write about how Frank, who developed the idea for the show, first saw footage of the anime program *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman* (1972–74, *Kagaku ninjatai Gatchaman,* dir. Toriumi Hisayuki) in April 1977 at the MIP (Marchè International de Programmes) in Cannes, France.[13] Although Frank was initially interested in the program, the motivation to bring the series over to the United States was the phenomenal success of the first *Star Wars* film, which opened at the end of May 1977.[14]

However, the original *Gatchaman* series originally took place on Earth and did not involve space travel. In order to make the show into something

that would work with the *Star Wars* crowd, Frank authorized new footage to be animated for the show depicting the team flying through outer space as well as a talking robot that "hosted" the show and strongly resembled R2-D2. Hofus and Khoury mention that some of the people credited as "writers" on the show were people who watched the Japanese originals and noted the action that occurred and the length of each speech utterance, which provided a template for the rescripting.[15] It does not seem that the *Battle of the Planets* staff worked on their episode scripts using a translation of the original Japanese scripts. Rather, they made up the story and dialogue based on what they saw (and created) onscreen. Additionally, a new score was created not only to make the show more familiar for a U.S. audience but "to supplement 'dead spots': silence in the original production."[16] From this, it seems that *Battle of the Planets* took *Gatchaman* as its raw material for a new and very different show. This method proved to be successful, though, as the $5 million spent acquiring the rights, commissioning new animation, editing, dubbing, and rescoring *Battle of the Planets* garnered domestic presales of the show of $25 million.[17] From there, *Battle of the Planets* spread to many other non-Asian markets in its Americanized form, bringing further licensing revenues. This successful method of bringing anime to the world market would continue into the 1980s and set the stage for the successes of *Voltron* and *Robotech*.

*Voltron* was a television series that began airing in the United States in September 1984. Like *Battle of the Planets*, it was a science fiction show that had been pitched to overseas producers at the Cannes market. The show comprised two separate Japanese television shows—*King of Beasts GoLion* (1981–82, *Hyakujūō Goraion*) and *Armored Fleet Dairugger XV* (1982–83, *Kikō kantai Dairagaa XV*)—that had been roughly shaped into a single storyline. It was necessary to bring the two series under a single umbrella since the number of episodes in each individual series did not meet the minimum requirements for American television syndication. Although the two shows originally had no characters in common, they were produced at roughly the same time by the same Japanese studio, giving them a similar look. (However, the two halves of *Voltron* were not popular in equal measure. The *GoLion* episodes attracted far more of a following and is often what people refer to when they say "*Voltron*" today.)

Although *Voltron* was intended as a show for kids, the *GoLion* source material had a lot more adult content. There were frequent battles throughout the show that often resulted in the spilling of blood, which were of course edited out for American broadcast. Although fighting and violence were allowed, any sort of death was taboo in *Voltron*. If any of the bad guys needed to

be shown being shot, they were always described as humanoid robots rather than living beings. Even the death of one of the main protagonists was explained away: rather than dying, he was just severely injured and had to leave the show for a while. Most allusions to the show's Japanese origins, such as occasional onscreen Japanese text, were excised as well. Some Japanese elements remain, such as the protagonists training by practicing judo in a couple of episodes, although this might not have struck a viewer as odd, because of the increasing number of martial arts movies reaching American shores since the 1970s, particularly more kid-oriented fare like *The Karate Kid* (1984, dir. John G. Avildsen).

The story of *Voltron* was very different from that of *GoLion* or *Dairugger XV.* In fact, as with *Battle of the Planets,* the producers of *Voltron* did not try to translate what was being said in Japanese but rather made up their own dialogue as they saw fit to match the edited scenes. The reluctance to kill anyone in *Voltron* also allowed the producers to create some original *Voltron* episodes. For example, after the last episode of *GoLion,* all of the antagonists have been killed, but they are merely injured or incapacitated in *Voltron.* This allowed the producers of *Voltron* to go back to the Japanese animation studio and order twenty additional episodes in order to continue the *GoLion* storyline. Although U.S. companies had been animating many of their programs for decades before *Voltron,* this marked the first time that the popularity of a program not originally made for the American market was successful enough to request that additional episodes be animated from the original Japanese studio.

In spite of its severe edits, *Voltron* has generally not been criticized within the fan community for the liberties it takes with episodes and characters. However, of all the science fiction anime television imported in the 1980s, it was probably *Robotech,* which began airing in March 1985, that caused the greatest controversy among fans regarding the editing of the program. The series is generally considered to be the brainchild of Carl Macek, who served as producer and story editor. His original plan was to license the anime *Superdimensional Fortress Macross* (1982–83, *Chōjikū yōsai Makurosu*) and redub it for American television. However, the original *Macross* contained a mere thirty-six episodes. As with *Voltron,* this meant that there were not enough episodes to qualify for syndication on American television. The producers of *Robotech* ended up grafting on to the end of *Macross* additional story elements culled from two entirely separate mecha anime shows-*Genesis Climber Mospeada* (1983–84, *Kikō sōseiki Mosupiida*) and *Superdimensional Cavalry Southern Cross* (1984, *Chōjikū kidan Sazan Kurosu*)—to bring the episode count to eighty-five. The plot of *Robotech* was rewritten to make the transition between the shows

OF ALL THE SCIENCE FICTION ANIME TELEVISION IMPORTED IN THE 1980S, IT WAS PROBABLY *ROBOTECH*, WHICH BEGAN AIRING IN MARCH 1985, THAT CAUSED THE GREATEST CONTROVERSY AMONG FANS REGARDING THE EDITING OF THE PROGRAM.

as comprehensible as possible. As was the case with the anime used in *Voltron*, all three programs had been animated at the same studio, Tatsunoko Productions, at around the same time, resulting in a consistent style that contributed to the appearance of continuity. The program shows how Earth deals with three successive invasions of aliens from outer space. *Robotech* carries the storyline from the crash of an unmanned alien space fortress on Earth, to fighting the Zentradi aliens who come in search of the battleship, to fighting off the Robotech Masters, to the onslaught of the Invid, who manage to conquer the Earth. The final chapter in *Robotech* follows a small band of freedom fighters as they make their way to the Invid stronghold of Reflex Point, where they are finally able to drive the invaders from the planet.

Unlike *Voltron*, though, a number of anime fans have decried *Robotech* as a butchery of the original Japanese programs. (Much fan anger was directed personally at Carl Macek as well. In the documentary *Otaku Unite!* [2003, dir. Eric Bresler], Macek recalls that in the 1980s fan anger at his treatment of the shows resulted in death threats against him.[18]) Although the characters were renamed and a number of edits made, much of *Macross* and the other two mecha anime survived the transition to *Robotech* fairly intact. As with *Voltron*, the popularity of the series prompted a number of attempts at continuing the storyline. A feature-length film, called simply *Robotech: The Movie*, was created by editing another anime production by the same director as *Macross—Megazone 23, Part 1* (1984, dir. Ishiguro Noboru)—with selected footage from *Southern Cross*. However, the film received a very limited theatrical test release and then faded away. Another original television project called *Robotech: The Sentinels* was attempted, but this too was unsuccessful. (A handful of episodes were completed and released straight to video.) A version of *Robotech* based on computer graphics (rather than cel animation, or animation that looks like cel animation) called *Robotech 3000* was attempted in the late 1990s, but fan response to its proposed look and storyline were unenthusiastic.[19] Based on the strong sales of *Robotech* on DVD in the 2000s, though, a new film called *Robotech: The Shadow Chronicles* finally got off the ground, and it demonstrates the increasing globalization of the *Robotech* franchise. What originally began as Japanese anime was recently turned into a movie that expands on the storyline, but which was developed

and coordinated in the United States, animated by the Korean company DR Movie (which has contributed animation to many "Japanese" anime titles), scored via "a live audiovisual link from Santa Monica [California] to the City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra in the Czech Republic."[20] As with *Voltron,* a live-action version of *Robotech* is currently in the works, to be penned by Lawrence Kasdan[21] (who cowrote the screenplays to the *Star Wars* sequels *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi,* bringing the cycle of influences back full circle).

## WARRIORS OF THE WIND

These examples seem to suggest that Japanese animation in the 1980s was ripe for the plucking by American producers. If one chose the Japanese source material wisely, then it would seem that post–*Star Wars* popular culture consumers would be very receptive. Even in the case of *Robotech,* which angered certain segments of the anime-watching population, the producers were able to generate a program that was ultimately a success. However, localizing anime was not always a successful endeavor. *Warriors of the Wind,* released at roughly the same time as *Voltron* and *Robotech*, has not fared nearly so well. Although *Voltron* and *Robotech* have persisted in popular culture to this day, *Warriors of the Wind* has been largely forgotten, other than as the "butchered" first attempt at bringing *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* to a world market. By all rights, *Warriors of the Wind* should have been successful. It was a postapocalyptic anime film that straddled the fantasy/science fiction divide, whose promotional imagery did much to play up its connections to films like *Star Wars* and *Dune* (1984, dir. David Lynch), to the extent that the promotional art depicted characters that did not even appear in the film (Figure 1). Not only was there no ancillary merchandising for the film, today the film is very hard to obtain and can only be viewed on old videotapes. (The Japanese original can be found very easily, though, which serves to bury the memory of *Warriors of the Wind.*) So the question must be asked: Why was *Warriors of the Wind* a failure when other shows not only succeeded at the time but have been able to prolong their cultural lifespans for decades?

To answer this question, we should begin with the localization process; if *Warriors of the Wind* was treated much differently or more harshly than its contemporaries, that might explain its failure. A detailed comparison of *Warriors of the Wind* and the original *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* reveals nineteen separate instances in which footage was removed in order to shorten the

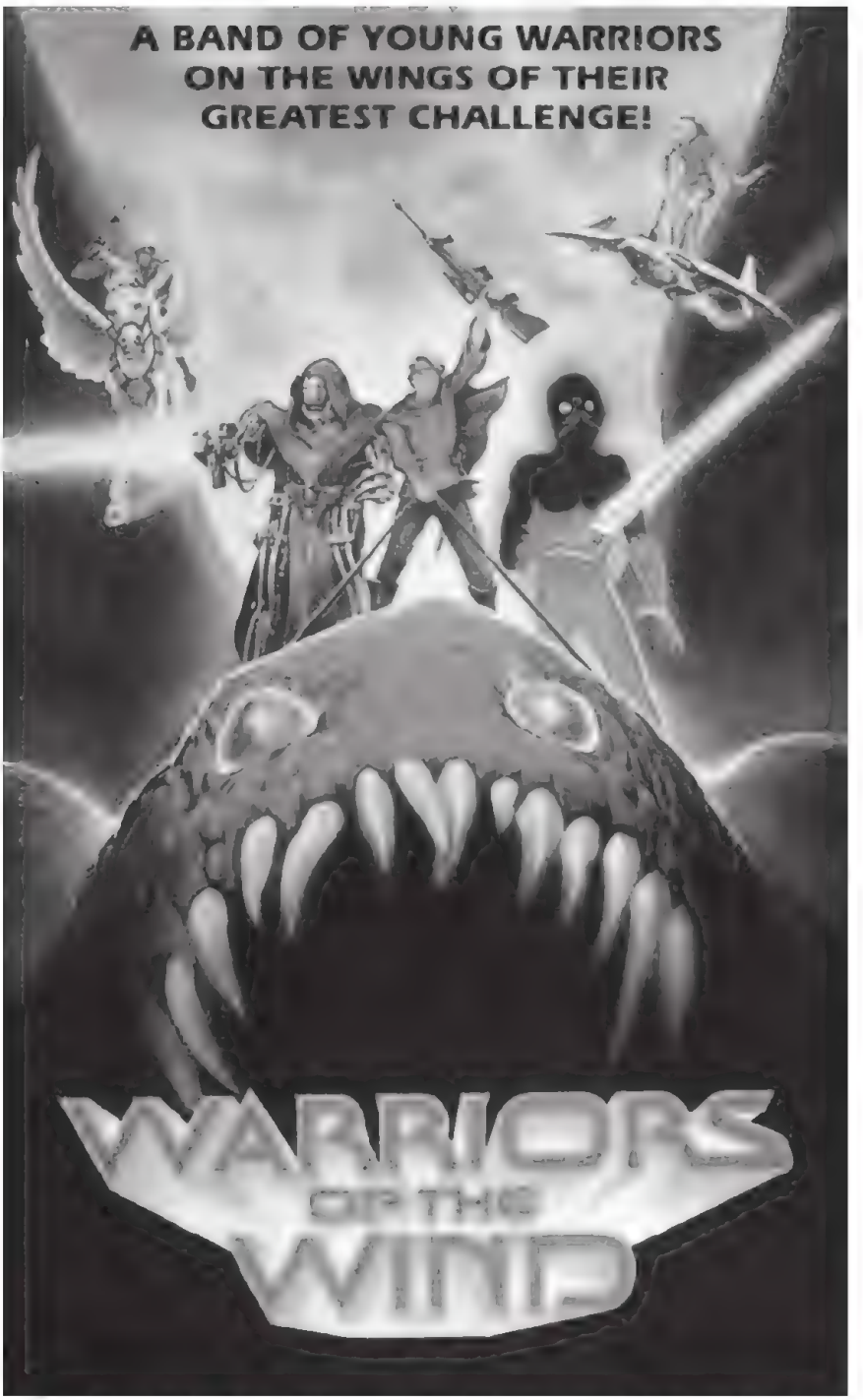



**FIGURE 1.** Cover of the VHS box for *Warriors of the Wind*. Copyright 1985, New World Pictures.

running time. The occurrence of these cuts is detailed in Figure 2. (The white lines represent cuts in the film as percentages of the overall running time.) All of the cuts are short, varying in time from five seconds to three minutes and seventeen seconds. The graph illustrates that the cuts were spaced relatively evenly throughout the film. However, there were five short cuts (over a quarter of the total) within the first ten minutes of the film, omitting many of the shots Miyazaki used to establish setting and mood.

*Voltron* and *Robotech* were treated in a similar fashion, as one can see in Figures 3 and 4, which chart the cuts made in the first episode of each series respectively. (The grey segments in Figure 3 indicate cuts that were placed elsewhere in the episode.) Although a similar pattern of editing cannot be extrapolated across the series based on a single episode, the graphs do indicate that cutting footage (and rearranging certain scenes) was a regular occurrence in addition to the changes in storyline mentioned above. If one views the original Japanese episodes on which *Robotech* and *Voltron* were based, it is easy to see the reason for many of the cuts. A number of scenes would not have been suitable for broadcast on U.S. television during morning or early afternoon hours (when most cartoons for children and young adults were aired in the 1980s) due to violence or sexual content. Additional cuts were needed to make each episode conform to the episode length necessary for syndication in the American market.

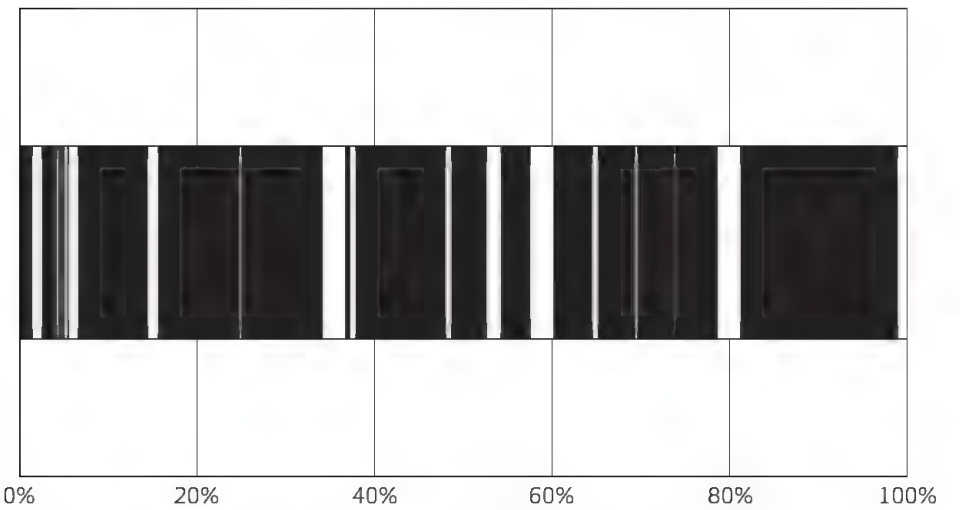



**FIGURE 2.** *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind.* The graph from left to right represents the running time of the original Japanese film or episode. The black part of the graph represents segments of the film that remained in the edited Americanized version while the white part of the graph represents cuts that were made to the running time.

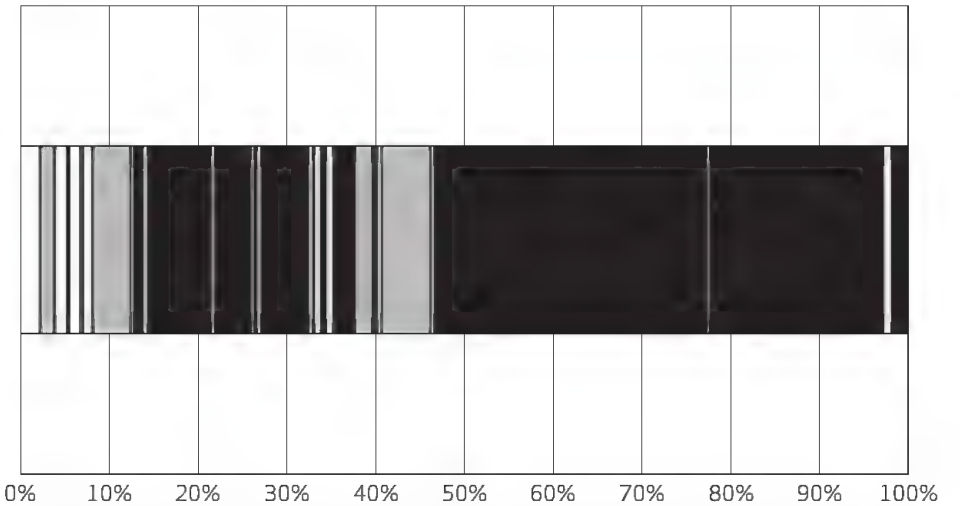



**FIGURE 3.** *Voltron* episode 1: "Escape from Slave Castle." The graph from left to right represents the running time of the original Japanese film or episode. The black part of the graph represents segments of the film that remained in the edited Americanized version while the white part of the graph represents cuts that were made to the running time. The gray parts of the graph represent segments that were removed from the Americanized version in their original location but appeared elsewhere in the episode.

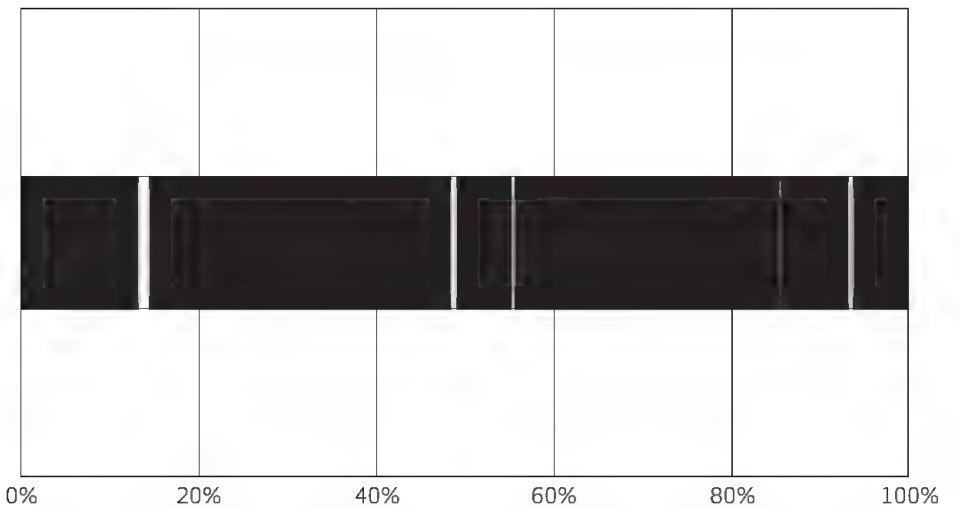



**FIGURE 4.** *Robotech* episode 1: "Boobytrap." The graph from left to right represents the running time of the original Japanese film or episode. The black part of the graph represents segments of the film that remained in the edited Americanized version while the white part of the graph represents cuts that were made to the running time.

This brings up the question of why certain scenes were cut from *Warriors of the Wind*. Since it was a feature-length film intended for theatrical distribution, it did not necessarily need to be edited for content or running time. In its description of *Warriors of the Wind,* the FAQ list on the page of Nausicaä.net, a fan site for aficionados of the film of Miyazaki Hayao and Studio Ghibli, states:

> New World Pictures felt it could only be marketed as a kids' action movie, so they cut out about a quarter of the movie (the parts they felt were "slow moving") and garbled the storyline in the process. Nausicaä was changed to "Princess Zandra." The voice actors and actresses . . . said later that they were never told what the story was about and so the acting was substandard. Miyazaki was horrified when he found out what they had done to his film, and Ghibli asks everyone to forget that this version ever existed. Fortunately, New World Video's rights to *Nausicaä* expired in 1995.[22]

As is often the case with fan lore, there is no evidence given to support some of the claims made. The view that the film was intended for children seems to be widely held although not necessarily supported by the cuts made to the film. The majority of the scenes that were taken out contribute to the overall view of the world in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* or serve as background for the motivations of the film's titular princess. However, all of the action scenes remained intact, including some that are violent and depict blood. For example, the film's first scene includes a shot of a human skull and a lone doll, indicating that children have probably died as well. Other scenes include killings, dripping blood, and dead bodies, however briefly. Still, the presence of such scenes belies the argument that the film was cut to be marketed as a "kids' action movie," although many cuts do omit segments that might be perceived as "slow moving." Similarly, through my research I cannot confirm the claim that the voice acting was "substandard" because the voice actors were not given relevant details of plot and character. In fact, based on my own subjective criteria, I would judge the overall voice acting in *Warriors of the Wind* to be slightly above average for the time in which it was produced.

Of course, any change to the voicing of a character can change how that character is perceived, even if the same dialogue is spoken. (And the dub script for *Warriors of the Wind* is often very close to the original Japanese dialogue; unlike the case in *Robotech* and *Voltron,* it is obvious that the producers of *Warriors of the Wind* worked from a translation of the script.) Subtleties in characters do tend to get flattened in the film, though. None of the characters

in Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* could really be called "evil," even though some do horrible things. Rather, such characters are shown to be working for what they think is best, even though they might be misguided. In its selected editing and dubbing, *Warriors of the Wind* simplifies these character relationships. For example, at one point Zandra (Nausicaä in the Japanese) says to Selena (Kushana) that she doesn't believe Selena is evil, to which Selena replies, "Oh, but I am." Later, when advised that it's too soon to revive the ultimate weapon she has planned, Selena scoffs, "It's never too soon to rule the world." Such utterances work against the complexity of the world Miyazaki tried to create in the original *Nausicaä* film, which was never supposed to present two opposing sides in such stark terms. Still, some reviewers picked up on this element and wrote assessments like the following: "Princess Zandra reunites her people after a seven-day global inferno to stop evil"[23] and "The forces of good battle an evil queen to ensure a peaceful and safe future for mankind."[24]

Although few positive reviews of *Warriors of the Wind* can be found, its status as a failure was far from universal. In fact, it played various film festivals in the United States and very little was done to disguise the fact that it came from Japan. *Warriors* premiered at the Los Angeles International Animation Celebration, September 25–29, 1985, and a *Los Angeles Times* article listed it alongside other American premieres of animated films from France, Australia, and Hungary.[25] A write-up from the film's premiere describes it as "incredibly exciting, blending elements of 'Star Wars' and '2001' . . . with riproaring pace and panache."[26] It also played in 1986 at the Asia Society in New York in a "Fantasy/Animation" series alongside *Zu Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983, dir. Tsui Hark) and *Uproar in Heaven* (1964, dir. Wan Laiming) as well as at a Japan festival in April 1987 put on by the Japan Information and Culture Center in Washington, D.C. If the film was "objectively" a failure at the time, it is unlikely that the film would have been shown in such venues, particularly those looking to inform a general audience about Japan and Japanese culture.

## GLOBALIZATION SUCCESS AND FAILURE

It is still unclear why *Warriors of the Wind* failed to find an American audience while other, less harshly edited shows succeeded. As detailed above, there does not seem to be anything unusual in the way *Warriors of the Wind* was handled. Therefore, the film's failure to secure an audience in the intervening

years seems to rest in how it was received by anime fans and fans of Miyazaki (both at the time and in years since) who cared about the film's artistic integrity. This is a crucial point; and since *Warriors of the Wind* received only limited theatrical distribution, there is a paucity of mainstream critical reviews written at the time from which to draw. Let's consider possible reasons fans may have found *Warriors of the Wind* unsatisfactory.

In his book *Fan Cultures,* Matt Hills suggests that cult texts share three main "family resemblances": auteurism, endlessly deferred narrative, and hyperdiegesis.[27] In short, cult texts are the work of a singular creative individual (or are perceived as being so), there are overriding questions presented to the characters in the text that are never fully resolved, and the events take place in a rich environment "only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text."[28] These three resemblances occur to a greater or lesser degree within any cultic media text. Hills characterizes such texts as needing to demonstrate an endurance of fan enthusiasm "in the absence of 'new' or official material in the originating medium."[29] By analyzing *Voltron, Robotech,* and *Warriors of the Wind* in the context of Hills's concept of resemblances, we can begin to get an idea of why the former two succeeded with American audiences while the latter did not.

THE FILM'S FAILURE TO SECURE AN AUDIENCE IN THE INTERVENING YEARS SEEMS TO REST IN HOW IT WAS RECEIVED BY ANIME FANS AND FANS OF MIYAZAKI WHO CARED ABOUT THE FILM'S ARTISTIC INTEGRITY.

The "family resemblances" of deferred narrative and hyperdiegesis suggest why *Voltron* and *Robotech* succeeded on American television. Because the two series had to encompass more than one Japanese anime series in order to be syndicated, they necessarily needed to rewrite their storylines to make sense of an expanded textual universe. Although the plots of *Macross* and *GoLion* left few loose ends in their respective storylines, *Robotech* and *Voltron* were written in a manner that forestalls a sense of closure in order to accommodate further episodes from the additional series. This move also, by its very nature, creates the hyperdiegesis Hills points to in cult media. By trying to merge disparate series into a single show, the creators of the Americanized versions tried to patch over obvious seams between the original Japanese components. This had the side effect of giving *Robotech* and *Voltron* a sense of expansiveness that one would not necessarily feel from a single source. Essentially, the edits made to *Voltron* and *Robotech* seem designed to intentionally create fan-oriented objects whereas *Warriors of the Wind* was not. All the component Japanese anime under discussion had distinct beginnings,

middles, and endings that wrapped up the storylines. In contrast, *Voltron* and *Robotech* were put together to have no such neat endings but rather temporary ones, after which additional adventures could take place. (As mentioned, this already happened in an official capacity when twenty additional episodes of *Voltron* were created specifically for the American market; these episodes would not have made sense in a Japanese context since all of the antagonists had already been killed.) *Warriors of the Wind,* however, offers less of an option for continuation than *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* does because the original Japanese ending credits were edited out of the film. In these credits, the audience is shown what happened after the climactic events of the film, hinting at possible relationships and adventures yet to come. Removing these scenes cuts off these impulses and constrains the world of the film.

The concept of auteurism, Matt Hills's final cultic resemblance, points to why *Warriors of the Wind* did not do well with American fans. Viewers of the film, particularly anime fans, may have brought heightened expectations to the viewing experience because the film was directed by Miyazaki Hayao. When *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was originally released in Japan, Miyazaki was far from the household name he is today, but fans still turned out in droves to see the film. (This is dramatized in the anime film *Otaku no Video* [1991, dir. Mori Takeshi], which is a fictionalized account of Japanese anime fan culture in the 1980s. In the film, Japanese fans are depicted lining up overnight outside a theater waiting to see the premiere screening of *Nausicaä.*) The film was based on a manga written and drawn by Miyazaki, which had been serialized in *Animage* magazine from 1982 to 1994. Therefore, the project was very personal to him, and in fact the comic continued for a decade after the film was made. Although casual viewers and those with little knowledge of the edits made to the film may have been willing to accept *Warriors or the Wind,* fans of Miyazaki probably wanted to see the version of the film as originally intended by its creator. It certainly would not have helped matters that Miyazaki strongly and vocally disagreed with the edits made to his film.[30] In this way, the reaction against *Warriors of the Wind* was probably not due to what it was but rather to what it was not.

Comparing *Warriors of the Wind* to *Voltron* and *Robotech* also illustrates some of the differences between film and television structures and audiences. In the case of the latter two anime, the need to make them suitable for broadcast on U.S. television was the driving force behind many of the modifications that were made: the shows needed to be cut to adhere to standards of length, decency, and the needs of the syndication market. In contrast, since *Warriors of the Wind* was intended for the theatrical and home video

A FREQUENTLY RECOUNTED STORY SURROUNDING THE PRODUCTION OF THE AMERICAN VERSION OF *PRINCESS MONONOKE* SAYS THAT MIYAZAKI SENT A JAPANESE SWORD TO HARVEY WEINSTEIN OF MIRAMAX WITH THE SIMPLE NOTE "NO CUTS!"

markets, such modifications were not strictly necessary. One could argue that something new was being created in the television shows from the reedited Japanese source material, but, since the film was seen as a unitary object, much less leeway was given to its edits. Additionally, the tendency toward auteurism is often more strongly pronounced with regard to films than television programs (although this is changing). Making changes to a given film seems much more "destructive" to the original text than modifications necessary to prepare a television show for broadcast, even through the latter may in fact make more changes and take more liberties with the text.

In addition to the structural differences between *Robotech/Voltron* and *Warriors of the Wind,* the film bore the blame for the effect its failure had on the subsequent American release of anime films. After *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind,* Miyazaki went on to found the animation company Studio Ghibli and create films like *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986, *Tenkū no shiro Rapyuta*), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988, *Tonari no Totoro*), *Princess Mononoke* (1997, *Mononokehime*), and *Spirited Away* (2001, *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi*), for which he won an Academy Award in 2003. Although he continued making films for a Japanese audience, Miyazaki's disappointment over the editing of *Warriors of the Wind* made him wary of any further dealings with U.S. film companies. It would be more than ten years after the release of *Warriors of the Wind* before official versions of any Studio Ghibli films would be released in the United States.

## CONCLUSION

Like *Robotech* and *Voltron,* the Americanized version of *Warriors of the Wind* was the form in which the film made its way to other countries around the world. According to the U.S.-based Miyazaki fan site Nausicaa.net, *Warriors of the Wind* made had video releases in the United Kingdom, as well as new dubs based on the *Warriors* edit in France, Germany, Spain, and Argentina.[31] In 1996, Buena Vista Home Entertainment announced a distribution deal with Studio Ghibli to release its films on video and DVD.[32] A frequently recounted story surrounding the production of the American version of *Princess*

*Mononoke* says that Miyazaki sent a Japanese sword to Harvey Weinstein of Miramax with the simple note "No cuts!" However, Miyazaki says that it was actually his producer who sent the sword, but that he was happy to have prevailed over Weinstein.[33] In the end, following the Buena Vista deal, no Studio Ghibli films were edited in any way without the explicit consent of the studio.

In February 2005, nearly twenty years after *Warriors of the Wind* was released, Buena Vista released the region 1 version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind,* the first time the uncut film had been made officially available in the United States. (The Japanese region 2 DVD of the film, released November 2003, contained English subtitles, meaning that English-speaking fans with region-free DVD players could watch the film.) The pall of *Warriors of the Wind* still hung over this release, though. In his review of the film, Chris Beveridge of AnimeOnDVD.com prefaced his discussion of the film's content with the following: "*Nausicaa* [*sic*] is a film that has suffered terribly before in its previous U.S. release. It had been cut by something like half an hour and was done dub only with a good chunk of the storyline rewritten. While if you knew nothing about it otherwise it was something that you could enjoy as a child, once you knew what was really behind it you could never go back and only lament that there was no other way of getting a properly translated copy of the film."[34] Although Beveridge does not mention *Warriors of the Wind* by name in the review, its presence is felt throughout. He mentions the time in the theater when he was "finally able to see it [the film] as meant to be" and concludes the review by saying he is "ecstatic that so many people are finally getting to see it for the first time."

*Warriors of the Wind* was certainly not the first attempt at Americanizing anime that failed, nor was it the last. The editing of anime series and films in an effort to effectively localize (and, one might argue, sanitize) them remains a contentious issue within anime fan communities and even within scholarly debate. A recent article in a law journal proposes that anime viewers (and other viewers of world TV and film) may have a kind of "moral right" to access unedited versions of their favorite programs.[35] However, as we have explored, editing an anime series does not necessarily reduce its popularity or franchisability, since television series like *Robotech* or *Voltron* would not have been possible without such actions. By expanding the shows beyond the scope of the Japanese originals, the creators were able to create enduring objects. However, editing can have an opposite effect, as demonstrated by *Warriors of the Wind*: it constrains the original text by omitting much of the surrounding world of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and works against fans' desired notions of authorial intent.

## Notes

1. Noel Megahey, "*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*," *DVD Times* (March 3, 2005), http://www.dvdtimes.co.uk/content.php?contentid=56349 (accessed July 14, 2009).

2. Raphael See, "THEM Anime Reviews 4.0—*Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind*," *THEM Anime Reviews* (2005), http://www.themanime.org/viewreview.php?id=231 (accessed July 14, 2009).

3. "Video List: *Kaze no Tani no Naushika*," *Nausicaa.net*, (2007), http://nausicaa.net/miyazaki/video/nausicaa/ (accessed July 14, 2009).

4. Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 78.

5. See "THEM Anime Reviews."

6. Toren Smith, "The New Miyazaki Generation: Spreading Even into English Speaking Countries," *Comic Box* 98 (January 1995): http://www.comicbox.co.jp/e-nau/toren.html (accessed July 14, 2009).

7. The degree to which fan outcry over these edits is genuine or a performance of how a faithful anime fan is supposed to respond is interesting but unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.

8. Abé Mark Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 8.

9. Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 120.

10. *Crusher Joe* DVD liner notes (AnimEigo, 2002), http://www.animeigo.com/Liner/CRUSHERJOE.t (accessed July 14, 2009).

11. Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Guide to Japanese Animation since 1917*, revised and expanded edition (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 2006), 86.

12. Curiously, *Gundam* did not become popular in the United States until 2000 with the television broadcast of *Gundam Wing* [1995–96, *Shin kidō senki Gandamu uingu*, dir. Ikeda Masashi].

13. Jason Hofus and George Khoury, *G-Force: Animated—The Official Battle of the Planets Guidebook* (Raleigh, N.C.: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2002), 17.

14. Ibid., 18.

15. Ibid., 24.

16. Ibid., 23.

17. Ibid., 23, 27.

18. *Otaku Unite!*, dir. Eric Bresler, DVD (Central Park Media, 2006).

19. Although, coincidentally, the CG work on this new series was performed by Netter Digital, who worked on the CG *Voltron* series around this same time.

20. Tommy Yune, *The Art of Robotech: The Shadow Chronicles* (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 133.

21. Borys Kit, "Kasdan to Write Screenplay for Big-Screen 'Robotech,'" Reuters/*Hollywood Reporter* (July 16, 2008), http://www.reuters.com/article/filmNews/idUSN1642634020080616 (accessed July 14, 2009).

22. "Video List: *Kaze no Tani no Naushika*."

23. "Cable TV Movies," *Chicago Tribune* (1963–Current file), ProQuest Historical Newspapers *Chicago Tribune* (1849–1986), (August 10, 1986): I38.

24. "Home Box Office," *The Washington Post* (1974–Current file), ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877–1991), (August 3, 1986): TW59.

25. "L.A. Animation Celebration Set for Sept. 25–29 at Wadsworth," *Los Angeles Times* (1886–Current file), ProQuest Historical Newspapers *Los Angeles Times* (1881–1986), (August 23, 1985): F19.

26. Michael Wilmington, "Cartoons for All Tastes," *Los Angeles Times* (1886–Current file), ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *Los Angeles Times* (1881–1986), (September 25, 1985): OC_E2.

27. Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 131.

28. Ibid., 137.

29. Ibid., x.

30. McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki*, 42.

31. "Video List: Kaze no Tani no Naushika."

32. "Disney-Tokuma Deal, from Studio Ghibli," Nausicaa.net (2000), http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/disney/dtdeal_ghibli.html (accessed July 14, 2009).

33. Xan Brooks, "A God among Animators," *The Guardian* (September 14, 2005), http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/sep/14/japan.awardsandprizes (accessed July 14, 2009).

34. Chris Beveridge, "Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind," AnimeOnDVD.com (2005), http://www.animeondvd.com/reviews2/disc_reviews/3645.php (accessed July 14, 2009).

35. Joshua M. Daniels, "'Lost in Translation': Anime, Moral Rights, and Market Failure," *Boston University Law Review* 88, no. 3 (2008): 709–44, http://www.bu.edu/law/central/jd/organizations/journals/bulr/volume88n3/documents/DANIELS.pdf (accessed July 14, 2009).

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THOMAS LAMARRE

# Speciesism, Part II: Tezuka Osamu and the Multispecies Ideal

Although the rhetoric of *sengo* or "postwar Japan" encourages the articulation of a resolute break between prewar and postwar Japan, postwar manga and animation do not abandon the speciesism seen in wartime manga and manga films. On the contrary, speciesism, that is, the translation of race relations into species relations, becomes more prevalent in the postwar era. Postwar manga and animation refine, intensify, and redouble the wartime aspiration of "overcoming racism" by summoning and implementing (often in the context of war) a multispecies ideal, which often takes the form of a peaceable kingdom in which different populations (species) coexist productively and prosperously. The continuity with wartime speciesism is particularly evident in the works of Tezuka Osamu, who is usually acknowledged as the pivotal figure in establishing new conventions for manga and television animation in postwar Japan. While this essay begins by exploring the continuity between wartime speciesism and Tezuka's interest in the ideal of a peaceable animal kingdom, it becomes clear that Tezuka remained wary of the multispecies ideal articulated in wartime manga and manga films. Here, however, the goal is not merely to point out sites of continuity or discontinuity between prewar and postwar Japan. Rather than using continuity or discontinuity to define

eras or objects, the aim is to proceed genealogically, to delineate the contours of a power formation associated with, and maybe impossible without, manga and animation.

## TEZUKA, THE POSTWAR

Histories of manga usually place a great deal of emphasis on the works of Tezuka Osamu in the formation of manga as we know it today. Commentators commonly draw attention to the introduction of cinematic forms of continuity in Tezuka's manga, which helped to consolidate a stable set of conventions for conveying and sustaining action, perception, and emotion across panels. In this respect, within manga history, the works of Tezuka have come to play a role analogous to theories of the formation of a classical style in cinema in the 1920s. If we add to this the idea of manga as "comics that are easy to draw," we might think of Tezuka's manga in terms of the establishment of an easily imitable system of expression for producing imaged-based narratives.[1] Or, if you prefer to think of the continuity of action, emotion, and perception in manga less in terms of narrative and more in terms of interaction with characters, we might see his manga in terms of a stable and imitable set of conventions for making image-based character arcs or reader–character interfaces. In either case, Tezuka is commonly styled as the god or the father of manga on the basis of his formation of a stable, imitable system of manga expression.

Similarly, histories of anime that focus specifically on anime as a distinctive set of limited animation techniques developed largely in the realm of television production (*terebi anime*) see Tezuka Osamu as the originator of anime, starting with his establishment of Mushi Pro to bring the manga *Tetsuwan Atomu* to the small screen. Here a contrast with full animation, that is, animation that strives for a higher degree of fluidity and mobility in character animation that is associated with cinema and the big screen, becomes important. Commentators stress how Tezuka's work created a new set of conventions for animation, at once stable and readily imitable, which spawned a lineage (or lineages) of anime, distinctive from big-screen animations such as the feature-length films of Disney Studios, the *dōga* (literally "moving pictures") of Tōei Studios, and the *manga eiga* (manga films) of Ghibli Studios.

It is interesting that in manga histories Tezuka is often credited with introducing cinematic modes in order to stabilize manga expression, while in anime histories, he is typically credited with developing an anime system

of expression distinctive from cinema or cinematic animation. Yet we don't need to set these two paths of Tezuka in opposition. It is clear that Tezuka's works mark both a continuation of and a break with cinema—in other words, a transformation in cinema (understood as a stable set of conventions for action, emotion, and perception). Nevertheless, histories of manga and anime have tended to avoid the logic of transformation, insisting instead on a radical break between the prewar and the postwar, which is embodied in the figure of Tezuka.

TEZUKA IS COMMONLY STYLED AS THE GOD OR THE FATHER OF MANGA ON THE BASIS ON HIS FORMATION OF A STABLE, IMITABLE SYSTEM OF MANGA EXPRESSION.

In recent years, especially in manga histories, signs of trouble with this historical paradigm in which Tezuka plays the role of godlike originator have increased, and the apparently stable ground beneath the historical emphasis on Tezuka has begun to shake and buckle, threatening to topple the exalted idol. As new materials from prewar and postwar Japan become more widely available, and as scholarly and popular interest in manga and anime history expands, we encounter a more extensive and less stable field of analysis, which has led to a reconsideration of Tezuka's primacy. Challenges to his ascendency are especially pronounced in the writings of Ōtsuka Eiji and Itō Gō, which I will discuss subsequently. But first I wish to signal that there is more at stake in reexamining the role of Tezuka in the development of manga and anime than broadening the scope of inquiry, correcting the historical record, or acknowledging the contributions of other creators to the formation of a distinctive set of manga and anime conventions.

Manga and anime histories have gravitated to the figure and the works of Tezuka for two reasons. First, Tezuka truly played a crucial role as an innovator and consolidator in both manga and anime production, and it is exceedingly difficult and probably impossible to bypass his contributions. Second, because a broader interest in manga and anime history is relatively recent, and because histories to date have often been rather informal, the histories of manga and animation in Japan have tended to rely on and to reproduce the entrenched paradigms for understanding Japanese history, rather than considering how materials such as manga and animations might allow us to rethink how we approach Japanese history or to invent new historical paradigms.

Among the most entrenched of historical paradigms for organizing Japanese history is that of a radical break between prewar and postwar Japan. Carol Gluck uses the term the "long postwar" to call attention to the

persistence of a seemingly intractable tendency, still in evidence some sixty years after World War II, to organize Japanese history around a rupture with wartime Japan. She writes, for instance, of "the original *sengo* [postwar] consciousness that wished and hoped for—although not necessarily believed in or lived—a history that could begin again at noon, August 15, 1945."[2]

Gluck's essay draws attention to a number of factors that encouraged this sense of a radical break with the wartime and a totally new beginning, factors that came into play immediately after the war under the American Occupation (1945–47). While the American occupiers of Japan, for instance, as well as progressive Japanese historians put history on trial, government leaders in postwar Japan continually announced the new driving out the old. And the sense of a radical historical break brought with it a new set of attitudes toward history. It encouraged the belief that history could begin anew, and, Gluck reminds us, it encouraged the idea that modernity had gone wrong in Japan but that it could be righted. It also invited a forgetting of Japan's imperial past, at least in the domain of official histories.[3]

With the establishment of *sengo* as *the* paradigm for understanding Japanese history, large divisions of history—that is, macrohistorical conceits—became gradually compressed into and distributed across the analysis of all manner of sociohistorical activities and events. Historical inquiry in postwar Japan has thus gravitated toward and selected those figures and events that mesh with the macrohistorical paradigm of *sengo*. The history of manga, for instance, finds a perfect fit with the *sengo* paradigm in the figure of Tezuka Osamu as the originator (or god) of manga, or of anime, or both. What Gluck calls the long postwar is repeated in the establishment of a radical break in manga and anime history by insisting on Tezuka as the origin.[4] The compression of the *sengo* paradigm into manga history has produced, as an analog to the long endless postwar, a long endless Tezuka. As a consequence, to look at Tezuka's manga and anime in light of their continuity with prewar (or wartime) manga and manga films forces an encounter with fundamental questions about Japanese history and modernity.

In his recent writings, for instance, Ōtsuka Eiji challenges the received paradigm of a break between wartime and postwar, precisely because he is concerned with what he sees as the resurgence of nationalism and the persistence of militarism in the contemporary world of manga and anime. He is openly and vehemently critical of recent attempts on the part of the Japanese government to make manga and anime into cultural heritage and to develop public policies for their production. Such concerns have spurred Ōtsuka not only to highlight the relation between wartime and postwar in his analyses of

Tezuka but also to challenge the idea of an unbroken, purely Japanese lineage for manga and anime. He writes:

> I should first point out that it is a mistake to view Tezuka Osamu's manga system of representation as originating entirely in Japan. It is not impossible to see manga in terms of a lineage that goes back to *ukiyoe* of the Edo period or comic animal art of the medieval period, but such a view of history ignores the "invented traditions" prevalent in so many of the introductory books on manga published in the late 1920s and early 1930s. With respect to stylistic innovations at that time, the reception of Disney is exceedingly important.[5]

In sum, Ōtsuka's concerns with the resurgence of nationalism in Japan lead him to emphasize the relation between wartime and postwar, which encourages him at the same time to situate these materials in relation to the history of Japan, both of wartime Japan in its conflicts with the United States and nations in East Asia, and postwar Japan at peace with the United States but complicit with American militarism in East Asia. His emphasis on the reception of (and reaction to) Disney provides a point of entry into this complex set of political responses and exchanges, for Disney signals for him, in a grand fashion, a history of Japanese relations with the United States.

While in this essay I too am concerned with the relation between wartime and postwar manga and animations, my concerns differ from Ōtsuka's in three crucial respects. First, where Ōtsuka relates militarism largely to cultural nationalism, my concern is with imperial desire. Which is to say, while the coproduction of national values and military techniques is clearly part of the problem of empire, I see the process of political indoctrination into national values (national propaganda) as secondary to, and as a retrospective effect of, a process of desiring empire evident in popular culture. With reference to Japan's national empire, I see not only a process of excluding, "inferiorizing," and dominating others through the generation of a sense of Japanese solidarity and superiority but also simultaneously a process of including and celebrating others—the realm of pan-Asianism, the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, and multicultural ideals. Too much emphasis has been placed on how so-called common people are passively duped or tricked into backing the nation and too little on how people come to desire empire, actively enough.

Second, because my context is one of engagement with anime and manga under transnational conditions, I am concerned with how the "desiring empire" associated with multiculturalism or multiethnicism, although at one

level specific to Japanese manga and animations, proves amenable to transnational circulation, production, and reception. I do not think it coincidence that the global boom in Japanese manga and anime not only happens with the rise of new information and communications technologies from the late 1980s but also corresponds with the open use of the term "empire" to describe our historical juncture and the desire for multilateral participation in imperial wars.

Third, while I am no more optimistic than Ōtsuka about the current situation, I nonetheless feel that, if we are somehow committed to empire in entertainments and media, however reluctantly or ambivalently, then we fans of manga and anime will need to work through these commitments and this material horizon rather than disavow them. Since this "work" will not begin with corporations, it should begin with fans. After all, who is better situated to appraise the situation?

Such concerns lead me to focus on militarism in relation to national empire and multiculturalism rather than in relation to Japanese nationalism alone. My point of departure is the continuity between wartime manga and postwar manga in the domain of "speciesism," that is, the translation of relations between races into relations between species, which I introduced in the first part of this essay in *Mechademia* 3. I will explore the postwar continuity with the prewar, yet my goal is not merely to demonstrate continuity or, for that matter, discontinuity. I aim to proceed "genealogically." Which is to say, rather than defining an era or an object, I am interested in delineating the contours of a power formation connected to, and maybe unthinkable without, manga and animation.

## MULTISPECIESISM

In his diary, Tezuka describes his response to a manga film released in the last year of Japan's Fifteen-Year Asia-Pacific War, *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* (1945, Momotarō's Divine Navy), writing:

> My first impression of the film was that it seemed to have adopted elements of culture films, and even though called a war film, it had in fact taken on a peaceful form.[6]

Tezuka uses the term "culture film" or *bunka eiga* to explain the peaceful qualities of the animated Momotarō film. The term comes from the title

of Paul Rotha's book, *Documentary Film* (1935), translated into Japanese as *Bunka eiga-ron* (On culture film), leading to an association of documentary film with the German *Kulturfilm*. These were films primarily on science that had achieved some popularity in Japan. As Abé Mark Nornes remarks, the introduction of theories of culture film in Japan coincided with the increased government control over filmmaking, "ranging from intricate censorship mechanisms to nationalizing entire sectors of the industry."[7] The culture film became integral to the government control of cinema, and the 1939 Film Law mandated the screening of nonfiction *bunka eiga*.[8] At the same time, the government also exerted tremendous control over animation production, making manga films central to its series of "national policy films" (*kokusaku eiga*). Thus, when Tezuka refers to *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* as a culture film, he implies that the manga film recalled nonfiction films designed to cultivate appreciation for science and nature rather than to promote war—whence its peaceful form.

There were a series of Momotarō films in the 1930s and 1940s, but Seo Mitsuyo's *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* was in many ways the culmination of Japan's wartime manga films, a visual and technical tour de force. This last wartime Momotarō film also expands on the logic of speciesism implicit in the previous Momotarō films. When Momotarō and his platoons of "Japanese" companion species (the film adds rabbit to the folklore convention of dog, monkey, and pheasant) arrive on an island in the southern seas, a variety of cute little "indigenous" or local animals—tiger cubs, monkeys, elephants, and others—eagerly assist with the construction of an air base. The film is a prime example of the difference between America's wartime speciesism and Japan's. Where American wartime propaganda commonly depicted the Japanese enemy as a dehumanized savage animal to be hunted down and exterminated, Japanese wartime speciesism, geared as it was toward visions of pan-Asian liberation and coprosperity, expanded on the logic of companion species, offering scenarios of species engaged in playful rivalry or cooperative endeavors. Alongside Momotarō with his awe-inspiring ability to produce cooperation among different kinds of animals, there were other heroes in the world of manga and manga film, such as Dankichi or Mabo (Maabō), boys who pursue their adventures in the company of an animal friend or friends, companion species.[9] There were also comical military animal heroes such as Norakuro the Stray Black Dog and Sankichi the Monkey.[10]

This emphasis in Japanese manga and manga films on heroes with animal companions, animal heroes, and animal cooperatives finds counterparts in European, American, and Chinese animation. Yet, taken as a whole, Japanese

IN EFFECT, MADAGASCAR, LIKE JANGURU TAITEI, STRIVES TO IMAGINE THE INTERACTION OF SPECIES BEYOND THE LOGIC OF SOCIAL DARWINISM.

wartime animations take the trope of companion species to its logical limit, which is especially evident in the Momotarō animated films with their emphasis on Japanese animals befriending local animals of other environments. Simply put, Japanese wartime speciesism headed toward "multispeciesism," which we might think of as a specific form of multiculturalism related to the Japanese effort to envision a multiethnic empire.

Like multiculturism, multispeciesism is an abstraction that organizes actual flows and practices, and at the same time is continually discountenanced and thrown into crisis by them. My discussion of the abstraction of multispeciesism is not an endorsement of it as an ideal, nor do I claim that the Japanese empire attained this ideal or generated successful ways of coding its flows of peoples and practical relations to them. In drawing attention to the multispeciesism of prewar Japanese manga and manga films, I aim to call attention to the existence of modern Japanese thinking about what we today call multiculturalism, for three reasons.

First, this is a lineage that was deliberately suppressed after the war, with the approval of a Japanese regime eager to forget the horrors of and ignore responsibility for the Fifteen-Year Asia-Pacific war. With encouragement on the part of the American Occupation, the postwar regime reconstructed Japan as a mono-ethnic nation, by stripping Japan of its imperial holdings, "repatriating" non-Japanese living in Japan, and generally discouraging any recollection of empire and its end (the atomic bombs). It is important then to counter this postwar indifference vis-à-vis Japanese efforts to envision a multicultural empire. Second, and more important in this context, we cannot understand the transnational reception of anime and manga, unfurling into a recognizable boom in the 1990s, without consideration of the genealogy of multiculturalism, evident in wartime multispeciesism. In fact, in my opinion, the current transnational popularity of manga and anime is due in part to multispeciesism. Multispeciesism not only builds multiple species/peoples into its characters and stories but also promises a different way of thinking about multiculturalism (at a time when that abstraction is in deep crisis). Third, while I am less optimistic than Donna Haraway about the forms of desire associated with companion species, I do agree with her that the cyborg is a subspecies of the companion species.[11] Consequently, my emphasis on the politics of multispeciesism is, by extension, a critique of discussions of cyborgs that introduce an insuperable divide between the personal and

political, dwelling on identity formation and technologies of the gendered self without any consideration of the social character of desire.

Now, multispeciesism makes a frequent appearance in Tezuka's manga, in a form reminiscent of wartime manga and manga films, as multispecies cooperatives and peaceable kingdoms based on animals living together in playful rivalry for the sake of coprosperity. It is surely not a stretch to conclude that what Tezuka saw as the "peaceful form" in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei*—that which invited him to see in it an appreciation of science and nature reminiscent of the culture film—was closely related to the film's vision of a multispecies ideal. For instance, in his manga *Janguru taitei* (1951–54, Jungle emperor), later adapted into television animation (1965–67) and shown in North American syndication as *Kimba the White Lion,* Tezuka follows the trials and triumphs of a lion cub who, although captured by human hunters and nearly exiled from Africa, eventually assumes his rightful place as emperor and strives to improve the lot of all animals.[12] Note that Leo is not merely king of a country but *taitei,* or emperor, of a jungle empire. The terms "emperor" and "empire" feel appropriate in the context of *Janguru taitei,* because this political entity comprises many species. Leo is not merely king of the lions but emperor of many species of jungle animal. In other words, Leo's empire is a multispecies cooperative, and the manga and anime offer images of different species engaging in playful rivalry or harmonious cooperation reminiscent of the jungle scenes in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* (1:164–65). There is a sense of musical harmony and symphonic cooperation (Figure 1).

To achieve cooperation among species, what is to be avoided above all is competition and war among them, and, as is generally the case in Tezuka's works, the manga *Janguru taitei* is haunted by questions about the circumstances under which animals of one species may eat those of another. In this respect, Tezuka anticipates the problematic that courses through recent animations for children in the United States, such as the first *Madagascar* animated film (2005), in which a group of New York zoo animals (lion, zebra, hippo, giraffe), transported to Africa, have to figure out how to survive without eating each other. After all, lions tend to hunt and kill zebras. In effect, Madagascar, like Janguru taitei, strives to imagine the interaction of species beyond the logic of social Darwinism. The key phrase of social Darwinism (survival of the fittest) is sometimes translated bluntly into Japanese as a brutal hierarchal conceit, "the strong eat the weak" (*jakuniku kyōshoku*), which effectively yokes the idea of "nature red in tooth and claw" to that of survival of the fittest. Other recent American animations address this question—how can different species cooperate as friends beyond the frame of

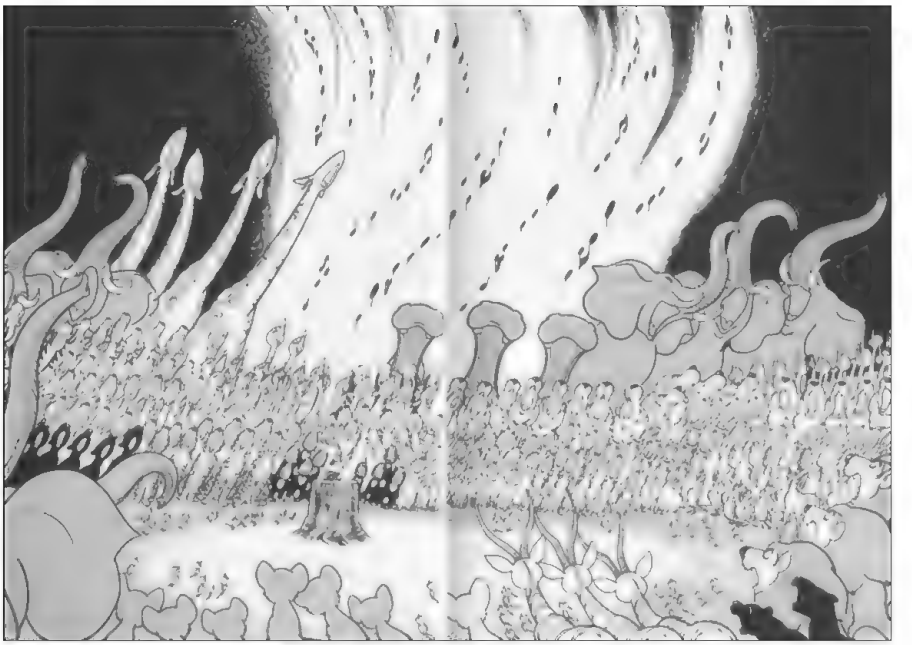


**FIGURE 1.** In this scene from *Jyanguru taitei,* the various species of the jungle gather in a peaceful circle of harmony.

social Darwinism? In addition to *Madagascar,* there are digital animations made for children and general audiences such as *Ice Age* (2002), in which the saber-tooth tiger gradually befriends a member of a "weaker" prey species, and *Bee Movie* (2007), which explicitly and comically superimposes species interactions and race relations with its rhetoric of species exploitation and civil rights.

Tezuka, however, is ahead of these animations, not merely in chronological terms but also in terms of the depth of his engagement with the problematic of multispeciesism. This depth derives in part from Tezuka's background in biology and medicine: he completed his training as a doctor even as his career as a manga creator began to take off, and in addition to manga designed as biology primers (such as *Manga seibutsu gaku,* 1956), questions about life, nature and species are a constant preoccupation in his works.[13] Yet the depth of his thinking about multispeciesism is not simply a matter of biological knowledge and scientific preoccupations; it also comes of his proximity to the Fifteen-Year Asia-Pacific War. Because Tezuka was born in 1928, the war spanned his childhood years; he was seventeen at the end of the war when he saw *Momotarō, umi no shinpei.* Tezuka cannot help but associate multispeciesism with war, and in particular associate it with interspecies or

race war. Consequently, his is not the feel-good "let-them-eat-sushi" or "prey-becomes-buddy" multispecies ideal of *Madagascar, Ice Age,* or *Bee Movie.*[14] Tezuka continually tries to separate multispeciesism (the ideal of multiethnic empire) from war, yet his manga tend to dwell on failure not success, and the multispecies kingdom is usually destroyed. Likewise those nonhuman creatures who strive for cooperation across species tend to die tragically.

For instance, in one of the sequences in *Aporo no uta* (1970, *Apollo's Song*), a manga in which a young man who delights in killing is gradually taught the value of love through a series of dream experiences, the young man is stranded on an island in the southern seas in the company of a young woman whom he learns to love.[15] The island is a peaceable kingdom in which animals live together without killing or eating one another. When the young man makes the grave mistake of killing a rabbit for food, the animals turn against him and, to teach him a lesson, injure the woman (35:100–101; Figure 2). As he nurses the woman back to health, he learns to respect the peacefulness of this multispecies cooperative. Oddly, as in *Madagascar,* the practical solution to the impasse of not eating other species is for the man to eat fish rather than "meat," a clear sign that multispecies cooperation has definite zoological limits. Yet, when it comes to thinking the relation of war and multispeciesism,




**FIGURE 2.** In this sequence from *Aporo no uta,* the animals of the peaceable island kingdom stand in accusation around the young man and his female companion, whom the animals have injured in retaliation for the man eating the rabbit's companion. It is as if the human has entered and broken the circle of animal harmony depicted in Figure 1, transforming into it in a theatre of operations.

it is the backstory for the existence of this peaceable kingdom in *Aporo no uta* that merits closer attention.

In a cave, the young man and woman discover the remains of a prior human inhabitant of the island, including his final testament. The remains are those of the head zookeeper of Hanshin Zoo in Kobe, who, during the "terrible and loathsome" (*imawashii*) war, received orders from the army to poison the animals. Unable to kill his animals, the zookeeper took two animals (male and female) of a number of species and transported them by boat to the island—a sort of wartime Noah's Ark (35:147). The animals seemed to understand the situation, and speaking from the heart to them, he succeeded in training them not to prey on one another. Thus, on the island, all distinction between beast (*kedamono*), bird, and human disappeared (35:148).

In this backstory for the island multispecies cooperative, Tezuka tentatively draws a line between war and multispeciesism, making sure that the peaceable kingdom stands in contrast to war and presenting the zookeeper's act as resistance to wartime atrocities inflicted on animals—the zookeeper becomes a "Schindler" for animals. In this respect, Tezuka's gesture is in keeping with the postwar Japanese imaginary wherein the focus on the horrors of war often provided a way to avoid rather than address the ideals associated with the wartime Japanese empire. War appears as an inexplicable drive to destroy, a descent into madness, a force of nature, or act of God—hence "resistance" can take the form of Noah's Ark, saving the species of the earth from destructive impulses of human nature. Because Tezuka indulges this view of war as a quasi-natural, nonhistorical force of destruction, he manages to dissociate the wartime imperial ideals of multispeciesism from the actual war. But then wartime manga and manga films had already begun the process of dissociation of the imperial ideal from the actual war, by displacing the codes of Pan-Asianism and the Co-Prosperity Sphere onto multispeciesism. This prior displacement helps Tezuka ignore, overlook, or "forget" the relation between war and multispeciesism. This is how multispeciesism in Tezuka appears, as in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei,* to take on a "peaceful form," although it is actually a "wartime thing" (*sensō mono*).

At another level, however, it is clear that Tezuka does not and maybe cannot forget the relation between war and multispeciesism. After all, war and peace (multispeciesism) always arrive together in Tezuka's world, as if they were somehow inseparable. While some of his manga end with indications of peace as a resolution to a warlike threat or military interlude, peace—particularly in its multispecies form—appears largely impossible in Tezuka. It is as if the peaceful empire of species were permanently foreclosed, as if to

overcompensate for the inability to separate it definitively from war. When the multispecies ideal makes an appearance, the peaceable animal kingdom is usually doomed. In *Aporo no uta,* for instance, the island turns out to be volcanic, and no sooner does the volcano begin to erupt than a rescue boat appears offshore. The two men who come ashore, however, will not listen to the young man's pleas to take the animals aboard; instead they fire on the animals. The young man and woman flee with the animals, and in the end, the volcano erupts, killing them all. Various forms of violence—war, human violence to animals, and natural forces (the volcano)—merge to assure that multispecies cooperation remains an impossible ideal.

This sequence from *Aporo no uta* is in effect the flipside of *Janguru taitei,* wherein the bid for multispecies empire proves more durable. Yet, looking at Tezuka's works as a whole, I would argue that *Janguru taitei* and *Tetsuwan Atomu* are somewhat exceptional in narrative terms in allowing for more durable interludes of multispeciesism and cooperation between species (both animals and robots). The durability of the imperial ideal might explain in part the popularity and exportability of *Kimba* and *Astro Boy* in the 1960s, as well as the appeal of Tezuka's lion emperor for Disney in the 1990s, in the form of *The Lion King* (1994).[16] On the whole, however, the impossibility of achieving multispeciesism, which comes of Tezuka's inability to dissociate it entirely from wartime empire, results in a tendency to embody a kind of "transspecies" potential in cute little nonhuman characters, whose suffering at the hands of humans repeats the sense of the impossibility of sustaining the multispecies ideal in this world and even in this cosmos (as interplanetary and intergalactic relations do not afford a solution either). Leo and Atom (or Kimba and Astro) are not entirely exceptions in this respect. In particular, the constant suffering of Atom at the hands of evil humans underscores the impossibility of actually building the peaceable kingdom on earth. But let me look at an earlier example of this embodiment of the transspecies potential in manga characters, one that had a tremendous impact on early postwar readers and paved the way for the later characters—Mimio the rabbit.

Mimio the rabbit plays a central role in two manga that appeared in print about the same time: *Rosuto waarudo* (1948, Lost world) and *Chiteikoku kaijin* (1948, Mysterious underground men).[17] In these manga, a human doctor has surgically endowed a rabbit with a human brain, producing Mimio, who walks and talks and thinks like a human. Significantly, however, giving a human brain to a cute little animal does not result in a creature with adult human capacities. The animal endowed with a human brain must be taught, and there are in *Rosuto waarudo* scenes of humans teaching the animals.[18]

These scenes make Mimio and the other talking animals appear rather like school children, unlearned yet potentially receptive to learning. In other words, the animal with the human brain is like a child, and its diminutive stature and cute features, together with its flexibility, receptivity, and manic energy, reinforce the sense that the talking animal is a special case of childhood. I will return to this dimension of the animal character in part 3 of this essay (to appear in a future issue of *Mechademia*), where I will characterize it as not merely as an instance of cute but as neoteny (an evolutionary retention of juvenile features). But first I would like to look at how the talking animal character becomes a test case for multispeciesism in Tezuka.

It is the inability of humans to accept the humanity of the talking rabbit Mimio that generates an aura of pathos around him, which in turn disposes the little rabbit to make greater efforts to win love and recognition from humans, especially from adults. (There is a general equation of human with adult: even though some children mistreat animals, and some adults befriend them, generally it is adults who mistreat the animals, and the manga thus divides adults and children in terms of their ability to accept Mimio.) Ultimately, it is the inability of adult humans to embrace different species, even when they so obviously display human qualities, that anticipates the unhappy end of the talking animal character. As Fujimoto Hiroshi of the Fujio Fujiko manga team indicates in his recollections of first reading *Chit-eikoku kaijin,* part of the impact of these manga came of the death of Mimio:

> When we reached the conclusion, we were all taken aback! Mimio dies at the end! We were so involved with the Mimio character and then he gets killed off! We said, "He can't do it!" But he did . . . Tezuka introduced an element of tragedy for the first time to a *manga* for children.[19]

The tragedy of Mimio, however, comes not only from the sensation of losing a beloved friend (a companion animal) but also from the sense of the inevitable failure of multispeciesism in the actual world, the world of adult humans. In other words, the specificity of Tezuka does not lie in the production of cute little critters, even though he did excel at making them and gradually amplified the 1930s modalities of cute that are largely associated with Disney (despite the contributions of a range of cartoonists and characters). Nor does the specificity of Tezuka lie exclusively in his willingness to kill off his cute little nonhumans in order to introduce "reality" into manga in the guise of cruelty, tragedy, or death. Rather the specificity (and the genius, as it were) of Tezuka comes of his skill in embodying multispeciesism in

cute little nonhumans, in an attempt to find a way to think through or work through the legacy of Japan's multiethnic empire in a postwar era characterized by the ubiquity of war rather than the end of war.

In fact, the very design of Mimio recalls wartime multispeciesism as articulated in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei*. While it is possible to see in Mimio the general impact of Disney (rather than, say, a specific Disney rabbit, Oswald) as well as Looney Tunes (Bugs Bunny), the design of Mimio immediately recalls the teams of little rabbit companion soldiers who so eagerly bridge the gap between humans and exotic indigenous animals during the construction of the airstrip in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* (Figure 3). Just as those rabbits assisted the contact between humans (Momataro) and local animals, so Mimio assists humans in their contact with alien species. With the death of Mimio, it is as if Momotarō's loveable animal companions, rather than triumphantly interacting with, and assisting with the liberation of, the exploited local species, ultimately had to die to prove the virtues of multispeciesism. This resonance between wartime and postwar companion species makes Tezuka's nonhuman cuties something of a paradox: isn't death for the cause of multispeciesism precisely how the Japanese war was articulated? Is this manga an endorsement of wartime multispeciesism, once again to the death, or is it a critical response to it?

THE ANIMAL WITH THE HUMAN BRAIN IS LIKE A CHILD, AND ITS DIMINUTIVE STATURE AND CUTE FEATURES, TOGETHER WITH ITS FLEXIBILITY, RECEPTIVITY, AND MANIC ENERGY, REINFORCE THE SENSE THAT THE TALKING ANIMAL IS A SPECIAL CASE OF CHILDHOOD.

Embodying multispeciesism in cute little nonhumans (and making them suffer for it) does change things considerably. On the one hand, wartime multispeciesism has been transformed in Tezuka into a potential that is crossing through or traversing worlds that are structured by interracial and interspecies violence, that is, a cosmos predicated on social Darwinism. The abstraction of multispeciesism has been opened to multispecies flows and becomes a transspecies potential. In Tezuka's manga and animations, the transspecies potential acts as an affective force that hovers over and permeates the cruel Darwinist cosmos, revealing itself in tragic sacrifices that promise salvation rather than alternative ideals. For all its ambivalence, then, Tezuka's gesture does allow for an exposure of and critical response to the relation between multiculturalism and war, provided we acknowledge the continuity of postwar manga with wartime manga and begin to think genealogically.

Thus far I have stressed the Japanese wartime critique of social Darwinism as the genealogical point of continuity/discontinuity that continues to trouble and motivate postwar Japanese manga and animation. From this

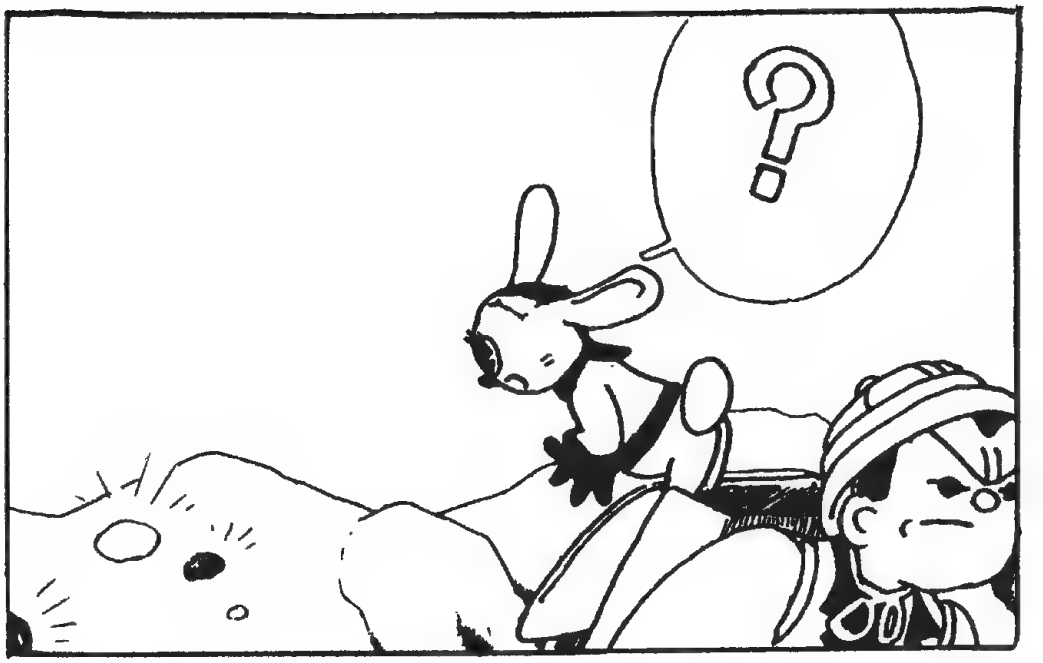


**FIGURE 3.** Tezuka's cute little rabbit Mimio in *Rosuto waarudo [above]* recalls the cute little rabbit soldiers who assist Momotaro in *Momotarō umi no shinpei [below]*.



point of view, Tezuka appears not as a godlike creator or moment of total historical rupture but as an innovative transformer of manga and manga films. We also begin to see that postwar Japan is not a "Japan after war" and thus not a "Japan at peace." Postwar Japan becomes a key player within the new military-industrial complex, and the prefix "post-" should refer us to the ubiquity and commercialization of war rather than its demise.

On the other hand, the embodiment of multispeciesism in cute little nonhumans finds support in the materiality of manga and animation wherein the force of the technical assemblage tends to channel the dynamism inherent in the mechanical succession of images into animated animal characters. As is often the case in Tezuka manga, *Rosuto waarudo* includes a series of comic asides about Mimio and other talking animals, to the effect that "this is just like a manga" and "only a manga writer would turn animals into humans." Such nondiegetic remarks focus attention on the specificity of manga worlds vis-à-vis the generation of animaloid humans or humanoid animals. This relation between animal characters and the materiality of manga and animation demands greater attention.

In Part 1, I discussed how animation tended to "animalize" the human, while cinematic conventions tended to humanize the animal. Animation tended toward plasmaticity, encouraging violent deformations and radical transformations of character forms, while cinema, especially in nature documentary, tended toward photography conventions that spurred a subjectification of animals. Needless to say, cinema frequently turns to deformations, transformations, mutations, and "animalization," yet when it does, it tends to incorporate animated or "animetic" modes of expression in the form of special effects. This suggests that we might consider the increased use of digital animation in cinema, which some argue has made cinema into a subset of animation, in light of the genealogy of multispeciesism.[20] But that goes beyond the confines of this essay. I will return to the materiality of animation in Part 3, but suffice it to say for now, in Tezuka, it is above all the animal character that harnesses the force of the moving image, which promises to afford a relay between manga, animation, and cinema. As such, tensions become condensed into the animal character, in its oscillation between humanization and animalization, or between animaloid human and humanoid animal.

In sum, Tezuka's trick of embodying multispeciesism in cute little nonhumans accomplishes two things: it opens the wartime codes of speciesism into a potential that traverses worlds, liberating its affective force, and it presents innovations in manga and animation techniques at the level of characters, which imply a shift in the relation between reader and viewer and

the image. Part 3 of this essay series will return to questions about how the materiality of animation and technologies of the moving image affect the deployment of animal characters in the works of Tezuka, but here I wish to address some more questions about speciesism in general, in order to situate the implications of Tezuka's dedication to a critique of social Darwinism.

## SPECIESISM, POSTWAR REDUX

Translating racial relations into species relations is a gesture so common that we often take it for granted. With the proliferation in recent decades of science fiction films and television series that highlight the encounter between humans and aliens, we have become ever more accustomed to thinking social, political, and cultural difference in terms of difference between species. But what happens when species difference becomes an operative logic that sweeps across and courses through our experiences of cultural, ethnic, social, or political difference?

Let me cite three instances of speciesism that may help us to think about what is at stake in speciesism in general, drawn from the 1960s (roughly) to set the stage for further discussion of Tezuka:

- Pierre Boulle's novel *La planète des singes* (1963, *Planet of the Apes*), in which primates come to dominate the universe, and humankind is a mute subspecies;
- Gene Roddenberry's original *Star Trek* series (1966–69) in which human space explorers, under a directive not to interfere with alien cultures, encounter aliens who test their capacity to obey their prime directive; and
- Numa Shōzō's *Kachikujin Yapū* (Yapoo, the human cattle, completed in 1970) about a future world in which the distant descendents of the Japanese serve as "domesticatible" bodies that the rulers of a white matriarchal galactic empire reengineer into a variety of household objects to serve and pleasure them.

Of these three instances of speciesism, the first two proved internationally popular, subsequently spawned films, and inspired other series. In this respect, although geared toward children or "general" or "family" audiences, due to its international appeal, Tezuka Osamu's *Jyangaru taitei* might appear to be a more obvious fit with *Planet of the Apes* or *Star Trek* than *Kachikujin*

*Yapū*. Yet I wish to call attention to *Kachikujin Yapū*, for its impact was profound in the Japanese context, and its relentless and unflinching exploration of the dynamics of the desire for subjugation in the context of empire is unparalleled in science fiction.[21]

In these entertainments, speciesism predicates political and personal interactions on "species difference"—a set of seemingly irreducible and insurmountable biological differences. As such, speciesism calls attention to the interaction of populations, under conditions in which one population cannot biologically assimilate or blend with the other. There are two faces to speciesism.

On the one hand, even though the concept of species is subject to intense debate in biology, as such entertainments attest, the traditional definition of species—organisms capable of interbreeding and producing fertile offspring—remains generally in effect in the social imaginary. One consequence of articulating social difference at the biological level of species is that hybridity becomes exceedingly difficult and sometimes impossible, however desirable. By definition, species do not interbreed. In this respect, because it implicitly evokes a limit with respect to interbreeding (who can marry whom and with what results), speciesism also bears echoes of totemism and its organization of kinship relations, such as Lévi-Strauss described them.[22] Yet, where totemism, if considered biologically, constitutes an attempt to regulate interbreeding,[23] speciesism establishes barriers to interbreeding, and when tales of speciesism allow for interbreeding between species, the resultant offspring are commonly treated as torn between different worlds, between different clans and totems, as it were, physiologically, biologically, and psychologically.

In *La planète des singes*, for instance, some apes and humans learn to negotiate, that is, to speak with one another, and even to respect one another. But we do not see any signs of ape–human marriages with hybrid offspring who might ultimately erase the very basis for conflict. And the novel is framed by the disbelief of chimpanzee readers who discover an account of interplanetary travel written by a human: impossible to believe that humans possess the ability to write, let alone pilot spaceships! In the original *Star Trek*, in which the multiethnic and multicultural cast stands as evidence of how future humans have overcome racism, a great deal of attention nonetheless falls on Spock, on his status as hybrid, as half human and half Vulcan. Frequently, Spock appears literally, that is, biologically, torn between two possibilities. This is such an important trope of the series that, in one of the later movies, Spock's human mother remarks to him that he is, after all, *physiologically* half human.

It is as if all the problems associated with racism had merely been displaced onto species difference. Consequently, speciesism feels like an exceedingly inflexible form of racialism,[24] wherein the difference between peoples is articulated as *natural*—that is, biological—difference, at the very moment when cultural or ethnic differences within the human species have allegedly been overcome. *Kachikujin Yapū* confirms this bias whereby speciesism serves to intensify racialism and thus to promote racism: in this story, it is the discursive transformation of the Japanese people into a species (Yapoo) by white scientists and ideologues that provides the rationale for whites to reengineer the bodies of Yapoo to suit their whims.

This tendency of speciesism to call on racial thinking and racist practices serves as a historical reminder that racial divisions were frequently articulated as species divisions, as biological divides. As Robert Young points out, debates about race in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century often centered on the question of whether different races could interbreed.[25] Those who initially argued that races could not interbreed changed their tack when confronted with evidence to the contrary; they then argued that, even if races could interbreed, the offspring would be infertile or degenerate. Equally disturbing, those who accepted the evidence that humans were one species often felt that the "lower races" should be bred with the "higher races" to improve the stock. Japanese novelist Natsume Sōseki cites one such encounter in his journal in 1901: "When talking with Brett this evening, he said that we had to improve the Japanese people. To do so, he said we ought to promote marriage with foreigners."[26]

In sum, on one level, speciesism appears to rely on racialism and racial "sciences," and even to reinforce thoroughly discredited ways of thinking about racial difference. If we recall that the first works of science fiction exploring the invasion of Earth by alien entities drew their inspiration from "yellow peril" discourses,[27] speciesism appears to be little other than a continuation of modern racialism and even racism by other means.

On the other hand, the postwar era was supposed to do away with racism or, at the very least, expose and challenge its presuppositions and operations. Precisely because scores of millions perceived World War II as a race war, the end of the war saw concerted efforts to put an end to racism, especially among the former Allied Forces. In November 1945, for instance, a conference was held in London for the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and about a year later, in 1946, UNESCO held its first conference in Paris under the direction of biologist Julian Huxley. The preamble of the UNESCO Constitution declares "the great

and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality, and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races."[28] In other words, to end racism was to end war.

Of course, it is not so easy to put an end to racial thinking, and even though the initial statements delivered in 1945 underscore the role of racial prejudice in the war, with the Associate President Léon Blum speaking of the war in terms of "glorifying violence and propagating the inequality of races,"[29] there evidently remained some commitment to, or confusion about, the reality behind the concept of race. For instance, while many speakers expressed their commitment to combating racial inequality, their solution was to promote equality among races. In other words, they accepted the existence of races as such. The British prime minister, for instance, stressed "the world-wide difficulty that we all have to face—the education of backward races."[30]

Part of the confusion came of the fact that the term "races" carried a fluid series of connotations running the gamut from "peoples" or "nations" (cultural or ethnic difference) to "races" in the sense of biological difference. Before long, however, UNESCO indicated its awareness that the very idea of race, with its connotations of inherent biological difference, threatened to ruin its mission of promoting the fundamental equality of humans. By the time of its 1950 statement, "The Race Question," UNESCO had begun to challenge the very idea of race as a dangerous myth: "For all practical social purposes 'race' is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. The myth 'race' has created an enormous amount of human and social damage."[31]

It is in light of such efforts to discredit racism by casting race as myth and pseudo-science that postwar speciesism appears politically backward and socially awkward in its insistence on thinking cultural difference in terms of biological difference. In the wake of progressive antiracism, to dwell on racial differences between humans could only appear reactionary. Progressive antiracism thus makes it difficult to explore the physical concreteness of racial discrimination. Part of the appeal of thinking race relations at the level of species, then, comes of its emphasis on physical, biological difference. The emphasis on species, on biological difference, imparts a sense of physicality and concreteness to racial discrimination, which threatens to disappear once racism is construed as an extension of myth or fantasy. It is difficult to grasp the actual cruelty and the real experience of racism if racism is cast as a matter of individual or collective ignorance. Consequently, the appeal of speciesism lies in the challenge that it poses both to reactionary racism and

to progressive antiracism, by staging an encounter between the human and the nonhuman as if to say, "Well, you think you're comfortable with difference, but what if you had to live with or work with some disgusting-looking species?"

In sum, in response to antiracist politics that tended to dematerialize racism, speciesism strives to give us a physical, visceral experience of difference. A universe formerly dominated by humans but now ruled by apes gives discrimination a physical charge that, say, a nation formerly governed by French but now ruled by Germans does not. And if Americans are intent on the idea of doing empire but getting it right this time (that is, without race war), what could provide a more concrete test of their sense of mission to coordinate the universe nonracially than a series of alien encounters? These species twists on racial politics present, needless to say, a thoroughly ambivalent gesture vis-à-vis racialism, but the gesture should not be conflated with racism or racial prejudice *tout court*.

IN RESPONSE TO ANTIRACIST POLITICS THAT TENDED TO DEMATERIALIZE RACISM, SPECIESISM STRIVES TO GIVE US A PHYSICAL, VISCERAL EXPERIENCE OF DIFFERENCE.

At the same time that such instances of postwar speciesism clearly derive from and expand upon racialism (with a systemic mapping of physiological and biological difference onto cultural or ethnic differences, and vice versa), their "rematerialization" of racial difference by translating it into species difference also entails an effort to move beyond the logic of segregation altogether. Speciesism rematerializes racialism in an attempt to transcend segregation. Speciesism strives to imagine, apparently in all innocence, how apparently incommensurable populations might come to an agreement, learn to cooperate, and productively work together. In other words, even as speciesism reinforces "natural" divides between populations (a sort of hyperracialism), it strives to overcome racist segregations by evoking multispecies cooperation. The result is a kind of biopolitical multiculturalism, in the form of multispeciesism.

Multispeciesism is like multiculturalism in that it aims for diversity, yet it insists on distinct boundaries between cultures and makes cultural homogeneity on small scales a precondition for cultural diversity on a large scale. As such, multispeciesism is biopolitical in two ways: (1) it emphasizes biological boundaries, with a predilection for translating cultural and ethnic difference into biological difference, and (2) it thus introduces life into politics, and in effect, it makes life the basis for politics. As such, the crises of multispeciesism typically evoke the struggle for survival, the destruction

of entire worlds, or the threat of extinction of a people, a species, a planet, a world, or a universe. Frequently genocide is recast as species extinction, and racial domination as species domination, which implies a reduction of the human to what Agamben calls "bare life" or "naked life," or analogously, a reduction of sentience to "bare sentience" (a manipulable and exploitable sentience that falls outside the zones of law or religion).[32] In such scenarios it is life itself that is at stake, life that is dominated, exploited, reengineered, and threatened.

The Allied Forces' postwar interest in multispeciesism—a nonhierarchical yet competitive coordination of populations that appear biologically incommensurable—presents a certain resonance with Japan's wartime speciesism as evidenced especially in manga and manga films that echo pan-Asianism and the Co-Prosperity Sphere. This is because multispeciesism in the postwar era likewise targets social Darwinism, at once translating and contesting the teleological social theory based on natural selection wherein "survival of the fittest" (already an unworkable reduction) generates the axiom "those who conquer are biologically fittest," and wherein hegemony becomes predicated on whatever passes for biological fitness. Multispeciesism pits itself against evils associated with social Darwinism, such as race war, genocide, and eugenics, and strives to imagine a nonteleological, nonhierarchical coordination of populations.

Resistance to social Darwinism not only became central to some lineages of biology, evolutionary theory, and philosophy of science and nature early in the twentieth century in Japan, but also played a crucial role in Japanese resistance to Western hegemony and modernity, which was frequently construed as founded in racial prejudice. For instance, the Japanese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 demanded not only territorial control over former German colonies in East Asia and the South Pacific but also made a proposal for racial equality, which mandated equal and just treatment for all alien nationals of states without distinction on the basis of race or nationality. The rejection of both demands confirmed the impression among many Japanese that Western modernity and the global imperial struggle were predicated on racial inequality and social Darwinism. Thus the Japanese bid to "overcome modernity," that is, to overcome Western modernity, also included resistance to social Darwinism and racial prejudices that appeared so integral to Western imperialism.[33] This is why Japan's Fifteen-Year Asia-Pacific War could be couched as a war of racial liberation, of freeing peoples and nations of Asia from Western domination, and offering the vision of a new sphere of nonracial—that is, nonhierarchal—"co-prosperity."

Because Japan's defeat discredited such formulations, it is easy today to dismiss pan-Asianism and the Co-Prosperity Sphere as transparently ideological ruses to mask military and economic domination, exploitation, and destruction. It is easy, too, to demonstrate how one of the prime instances of multispecies cooperation in manga films, the sequence in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* of indigenous animals happily assisting Momotarō and his Japanese animal teams, is predicated on forms of hegemony and hierarchy. Multispeciesism is, in other words, easy to debunk. Yet, if I am not content merely to debunk and dismiss the multispecies ideal, it is because it is still with us, prevalent in family and children's films and in science fiction, evidently not so readily dismissed and not so transparent in its operations. In this respect, it is not a Platonic Ideal that preexists its expression but an ideal that arrives in its reiteration. Or, put another way, multispeciesism is a code or axiom that, by organizing flows, produces an ideal.[34] This ideal becomes more pronounced in the postwar era in response to the racial horrors of the "Great War." The ideal is that enemies, no matter how nonhuman in appearance, are not to be dehumanized or bestialized, that is, reduced to naked life forms, for exploitation or extermination. In addition, the multispecies ideal demands nonhierarchical cooperation.

In sum, in calling attention to multispeciesism, especially its prevalence in the postwar era as a "solution" to racism, I do not aim to debunk or embrace it as an ideal or ideology. What interest me are its side effects. I am interested in what happens when multispeciesism comes into play: because it cannot entirely code the flows that it evokes and addresses, it begins to falter and break down, to release other potentials. When speciesism at once evokes and bars racism, there arises a whole new realm of indefinable and uncontainable desires.

I have already drawn attention to how Tezuka, precisely because he does not feel comfortable with multispeciesism as a solution, inscribes it instead as a transspecies potential in cute little nonhuman characters whose delightful antics and human-inflicted suffering go hand and hand. In *La planète des singes,* some humans and apes begin to treat each other with respect, which suggests a degree of comfort with a multispecies solution. In particular, the human man feels strongly attracted to a female chimpanzee scientist who assists him. Likewise, in the first American film version of the novel, *The Planet of the Apes* (1969), apes and humans start to find each other physically attractive. Even though the film lingers somewhat predictably on the desirability of the white man, even here the multispecies ideal is breaking into a play of surfaces, evoking an eroticism that defies easy relation to biological or social

reproduction. The original *Star Trek* appears quite at ease with its multispecies ideal, yet Spock's hybrid character, frequently in physical torment, becomes the site of inscription of the violence of multispeciesism and a new potential of breaking with it. For instance, while Spock's general celibacy and lack of children feel like a distant echo of old notions of the infertile hybrid (a hyperrational emotionless mule), the consequent bond with Kirk and McCoy takes on an erotic charge that goes beyond the realm of everyday devotions and regulations (which slash fiction is so adept at locating and channeling).

Among these instances of 1960s multispeciesism, *Kachikujin Yapū* takes an unusual tack. Significantly, as in Tezuka, the multispecies ideal is barred but with greater intensity. I would hazard to say that Japanese fictions were less quick to embrace multispeciesism in the 1960s because memories of Japan's wartime multispeciesism lingered. In contrast, as John Dower points out and as I stressed previously, the former Allies, especially the United States and England, had largely articulated speciesism in the form of dehumanization and bestialization, rather than multispeciesism or companion species.[35] In other words, the Japanese faced difficulties with the multispecies ideal that the Allies did not.

In *Kachikujin Yapū,* racial difference is inscribed in resolutely physiological and biopolitical terms; populations designated racially as white, black, and yellow are subject to different forms of biological engineering that assures strict segregation and hierarchy. Under such conditions, a nonhierarchal coordination of populations is unimaginable. Oddly, however, the contemporary Japanese male protagonist, when transported with his white German fiancée to this future universe, comes gradually to enjoy his physical debasement and subjugation, finding pleasure in the excruciating biological engineering that transforms him into a piece of "furniture" for her pleasure. Thus, in *Kachikujin Yapū,* the entire galactic empire appears as an elaborate but necessary setup for the incitement of male masochism, for the proliferation of perverse pleasures, even as white supremacy stands exposed.

This is where speciesism forces a confrontation with something happening between (or across) species that cannot readily be reinscribed into racialism, codes of segregation, or the totemic regulation of populations; where the impulse to force an encounter with radical physiological difference beyond race spurs the proliferation of perverse pleasures. This has become such a common gesture that today we tend to count on speciesism to generate perverse situations that implicate transspecies potential. We do not bat an eye when faced with such eccentric species interactions as ABe Yoshitoshi's manga and animation *Nia andaa sebun* (NieA_7, 2000) in which aliens arrive on earth

and learn to live among humans; or Yoshitomi Akihito's *Blue Drop* (serialized 2004–2005), which explores the aftermath of a war between humanity and an alien race/species consisting of lesbian women; or *Keroro gunsō* (Sergeant Frog, manga begun in 1999, anime series in 2004) in which members of an army of humanoid frogs, abandoned on earth in the course of an aborted invasion, accommodate themselves to human life, accepting love and violence from their human keepers, while displaying classic *otaku* behavior patterns. As such examples attest, speciesism has today expanded beyond its initial emphasis on racial difference to embrace all manner of cultural difference—racial, national, ethnic, subcultural, generational, and so on. It has become a stupendous translation machine that shuttles every difference it touches into biopolitical difference, introducing life into politics at every turn.

As this massive species translation project has kicked into high gear across the world, it has become more and more difficult to assign a reference to species, to figure out what a particular species stands for. With wartime speciesism, and even with speciesism of the 1960s, it is still possible to read speciesism in terms of reference to actual peoples or cultures or nations, that is, in terms of representation and national allegory; it is still possible to insist that the meaning of speciesism lies in how it represents actual others of the nation or national empire. Yet always inherent in the translation of races or cultures into species is a movement away from referential and representational strategies. Thus speciesism forces us to think beyond the comfortable received framework of representation theory. If we wish to understand what is at stake in this now global translation machine that transforms cultural difference of every variety into biopolitical difference, we need to think not only in terms of allegorical representation (national allegory or racial allegory) but also in terms of biopolitical operations. Thus we return to the problematic of cute little nonhuman species, not merely as allegorical accounts of Japan or the United States but as biopolitical operations. Here, too, Tezuka's nonhuman characters are the benchmark.

## BEYOND NATIONAL ALLEGORY AND REPRESENTATION THEORY

In *Chōjin taikei* (which Tezuka titled in English *Birdman Anthology*),[36] serialized in *SF Magazine* from March 1971 to February 1975 and subsequently published in two volumes in his collected works, Tezuka invents a future in which birds suddenly start to evolve, eventually becoming "birdmen" with

SPECIESISM HAS TODAY EXPANDED BEYOND ITS INITIAL EMPHASIS ON RACIAL DIFFERENCE TO EMBRACE ALL MANNER OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE.

an intelligence equal or superior to humans, and entering into a full-scale "war without mercy" to exact revenge on the humans, the species that has treated them cruelly for so long. Composed of a series of stories recounting key events across the centuries in which the birdmen gradually subjugate, exterminate and replace humans as the dominant species on earth, *Chōjin taikei* explores the implications of race war by translating race relations into species relations, first on a global scale and then on a galactic scale.

In the early chapters, Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film *The Birds* is clearly a point of reference, as the birds begin to turn against humans, learning to light matches and to set fire to human dwellings and then to entire cities. In the third chapter, in which the birds launch an aerial assault on the cities of Japan (94:28–29), the air raids of World War II provide a point of reference, and the imagery of the birds setting fire to Tokyo recalls the 1945 fire bombings of Tokyo (Figure 4), which included one of the most destructive bombing raids in history, killing more than 100,000, injuring tens of thousands, and leaving at least one million homeless.[37] Tezuka himself experienced an air raid as a boy in Osaka during the war, and such images of destruction occur frequently in his manga.[38] Yet rather than humans (Americans) wreaking mass destruction on other humans (Japanese), now it is one species (birds) intent on destroying another (humans). *Chōjin taikei* thus uses species war to expose the dehumanization implicit in the racial politics of World War II, wherein the enemy was construed as a beast to be hunted down and exterminated.

In the wake of these iconic references to the end of World War II and the defeat of Japan, the manga continues to provide historical points of reference for its species war. It is as if *Chōjin taikei* were offering a history of postwar Japan in allegorical form. When the birds defeat Japan, for instance, the manga refers us explicitly and repeatedly to the American Occupation of Japan. While the Japanese government holds debates on how to deal with the conquerors, a professor appears who speaks the birds' language. Via the professor, the birds make an offer to Japan: if the Japanese allow the birds to use Japan as a base for their revolution (which amounts to the elimination of humans), the birds offer in exchange to let the Japanese live in peace. In response to this offer, the Minister of Foreign Affairs remarks, with a combination of irony and diplomacy, "Well, the Japanese have already provided for the establishment of [military] bases on [Japanese soil]." After all, he concludes, Japan has experience conniving with any number of countries (94:32–34).




**FIGURE 4.** As the birdpeople in Tezuka's *Chōjin taikei* launch their aerial attack on the city of Tokyo, the imagery recalls not only Hitchcock's *Birds* but also the fire bombing of Tokyo by the Americans in World War II.

At this level, the manga is explicitly allegorical, inviting us to read the birds as Americans, and the humans as Japanese. This is national allegory. Subsequent episodes repeat this association of the "bird occupation" of Japan with the American Occupation of Japan. Chapter 8, for instance, tells of a talented human writer who sells his skills to the birds, writing brilliant political speeches for them and thus furthering their cause. As the writer becomes disenchanted with his role and sinks deeper into drink, he remarks, "I've unintentionally been doing PR for them with the humans. It's like skillfully teaching Americanism under the American Occupation" (94:89). Ultimately, when the writer resists, he ends up caged like a bird, under the supervision of birds.

With such references, Tezuka's manga exposes both the militarism of the Pax Americana and Japanese complicity with the American agenda. If the birds are Americans, the humans are the peoples within the American military-industrial theatre of operations—and Tezuka shows how the Japanese have betrayed their "species" to preserve an illusion of peace and prosperity. In the early 1970s, with a sense of the futility of protest against the powerful occupiers, such anti-American resentment is hardly surprising. The defeat of a second wave of widespread popular protest in Japan against the renewal of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (Ampo) not only resulted in the continuation of the American military presence in Japan but also effectively subordinated Japanese interests to American interests. More surprising is Tezuka's insistence on the complete failure of negotiation or coordination between species, between humans and birdpeople. The rare instances of mutual sympathy or understanding are invariably fleeting and ineffective, giving way to a brutal struggle to the finish. Multispeciesism proves unthinkable, and the birds ultimately eradicate the humans.

This is also where reading *Chōjin taikei* as national allegory clearly breaks down. There are signs all along that *Chōjin taikei* is not only an allegorical tale of Japan–U.S. relations in the postwar era. It is impossible to make birds neatly coincide with Americans, and humans with Japanese. After all, the birds are also invading the United States, and it is the future of humankind that is at stake. When racialized national relations are translated into species relations, there tends to be an escalation in the scale and stakes of conflict. What can initially be articulated, at least to some extent, in terms of national conflict and international relations cannot ultimately be explained by, or confined to, the national or international. With the translation of race relations into species relations, it becomes impossible to explain race relations historically, as world history or national history. Instead, racial conflict—indeed

race war—turns out to be inevitable, immutable, and eternal. Once the birdpeople successfully eradicate humans, for instance, something like racial prejudice arises between different species of bird. Chapter 18, for instance, tells the tale of young lovers, a young birdman and a young birdwoman of different species who fall in love and dream of marriage. When their species object to their marriage they try to flee, but their fellow birdmen track and kill them (95:140–46). Speciesism and racism prove indiscernible, and the translation of race relations into species relations (and vice versa) makes it seem that violent segregation and hierarchies were fated eternally to reappear.

Specific instances of racism and speciesism thus appear mythic rather than historical—part of an eternal cycle of war and hatred of difference. *Chōjin taikei* thus turns from historical difference to mythic difference, and even Christ—or something just like him—makes an appearance among the birdpeople, as Pororo. This is a general tendency in Tezuka's manga: speciesism is conducive to a general transformation of historical events into mythic instances. As a consequence, it becomes impossible to read species referentially or allegorically. Species relations play out in vast mythic cycles. *Chōjin taikei* enacts this conceit in its narrative structure: the chronological scale is vast, and the manga offers vignettes that show us the development of the birdpeople at key moments. Each of the key moments adopts the contours of an iconic, generic or mythic scenario: star-crossed lovers, cowboys and Indians, Jesus and Mary Magdalene, for example. In this respect, *Chōjin taikei* is a harbinger on a reduced scale of the multivolume series deemed Tezuka's magnum opus, *Hi no tori* (*Phoenix*), on which Tezuka worked consistently throughout his career, from the 1960s till his death in 1989. Personal histories play out in accordance with a series of genres, icons, and generic scenarios, but in perpetuity, gradually taking on a mythic and cosmological dimension.

Yet speciesism in Tezuka does not simply result in a transformation of history into myth. His works do not merely mythologize historical conflicts. They often include a demystification or "demythification" of the very mythic cycles that they enact. In *Chōjin taikei,* for instance, it turns out that the evolution of birds into birdpeople has been engineered by the representative of avian species who presides over a sort of intergalactic council that oversees the course of development of diverse worlds. Allegorically speaking, this is an intergalactic version of the United Nations. The avian representative decides, as if neutrally, that the primates on Earth have evolved improperly. Feeling that the birds' turn has thus arrived, the avian representative sends bird feed to Earth that spurs the rapid evolution of intelligence among birds, which allows for their gradual triumph over the humans as the dominant species.

At the end of the manga, however, the council reviews the development of birdpeople on Earth, and another representative accuses the avian representative of having acted on the basis of an undue bias toward birds—in other words, the avian stands accused of species prejudice. Ironically, the accuser, a cockroach person, claims that it is high time to give the cockroaches of Earth their chance to develop and dominate.

If history appears to repeat itself to the point that it verges on mythic repetition, it is because myths about modernization are already at work behind the scenes. *Chōjin taikei* shows us a universe mired in its myths of development and evolution, doomed to repeat bad abstractions throughout eternity. Theories of evolutionary progress and teleological development prove to be nothing more than endlessly escalating form of racism. *Chōjin taikei* thus presents a satire of social Darwinism or the application of theories concerning the evolution of species to the social—the twisted logic wherein natural selection is couched in terms of "survival of the fittest" with the corollary that the victors in war have been "naturally" selected, are "naturally" superior or fitter.

In Tezuka, as in Japanese wartime speciesism, the enemy is social Darwinism or the teleological theories of evolutionary progress associated with Western modernity (and whiteness), yet Tezuka does not envision an overcoming of modernity in the manner of the wartime thinkers who pursued such a critique. In his manga, there is no social or political formation that stands as an alternative to linear and teleological progress, to social Darwinist modernity. Nor do his manga explicitly present an alternative nonlinear, nonteleological theory of evolution. This may come as a surprise, given Tezuka's background in biology and medicine, and in light of the postwar challenge to theories of race and social Darwinism issued by postwar biologists, and given the precedents for alternative ways of thinking evolution in Japanese biology. Yet I tend to think that the legacy of overcoming modernity in Japan (and the discrediting of pan-Asianism and Co-Prosperity) made Tezuka exceedingly wary of offering sociopolitical solutions to social Darwinism. In any event, in keeping with the general trend throughout his work, *Chōjin taikei* does not turn to multispecies cooperation as an ideal solution to the racism implicit in social Darwinism.

Instead of offering a way to overcome modernity, Tezuka shows how attempts at linear, teleological evolution (progress) go nowhere: rather than advance along the line of progress, such attempts result in endless repetition of the same generic tragedies. We can also read his critique of goal-directed linearity and teleology as an allegory for postwar Japan. Many Japanese commentators, both on the right and left, have suggested that postwar Japan is

characterized by a removal from history, or more precisely, from world history, because of Japan's postwar removal from war.[39] In other words, due to the lack of war and the persistent sense of defeat, the postwar in Japan results in an impasse in which events never bring about a sense of historical transformation. There is an endless serialization of the same, an endless postwar. While I think that there is something to be gained by reading *Chōjin taikei* in terms of an allegory of the postwar (especially if it allows us to rethink the postwar in terms of a linearity that short-circuits and turns into an endless loop),[40] reading manga as a representation of Japan leaves us trapped within the endless postwar, replicating rather than challenging representations of Japan. What is more, we will remain unable to explain the transnational movement of postwar manga and anime except in terms of a foreign consumption of representations of Japan or Japanese representations. This is where the materiality of animation and manga demands attention.

## Notes

1. This is Jacqueline Berndt's turn of phrase (personal communication). The idea of the establishment of a classical film style is especially associated with David Bordwell. For an overview and critique of his conceptualization, see Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 332–50 (London: Arnold, 2000).

2. Carol Gluck, "The Past in the Present," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (University of California Press, 1993), 66.

3. While Carol Gluck indicates different registers of historical memory and history making, including popular culture, she does not speak specifically about manga or animation. For the most part, when commentators have addressed war memory in Japanese popular culture, the emphasis has fallen on war amnesia. Yet scholarship has largely dealt with canonical literature and film, and thus the sample has been relatively small, with a bias toward what is often called in Japan *junsui bunka* or "pure culture" in contrast to *taishū bunka* or "mass culture." Yet, as Matthew Penney argues, it may not be fair or even accurate to characterize Japanese cultural production in terms of war amnesia. Japanese mass culture or popular culture has consistently addressed the legacy of the war and frequently in critical terms.

4. In a recent exhibit on Yamakawa Sōji held at the Yayoi Bijutsukan in Tokyo (April 3–June 29, 2008), I was surprised by the insistence in the commentary about situating Yamakawa in the history of manga that his image-based narratives, no matter how cinematic in their devices, should be seen only as precursors to the full development of manga narrative by Tezuka. While it may in fact be apt to think of Yamakawa's "manga" more as illustrated stories than actual manga, what is striking is the insistence on preserving Tezuka's place in manga history as the actual origin, in light of which other forms are necessarily incomplete precursors.

5. Ōtsuka Eiji, "Disarming Atom: Tezuka Osamu's Manga at War and Peace," trans. Thomas LaMarre, *Mechademia* 3 (2008): 116.

6. Tezuka Osamu, *Tezuka Osamu taizen* (Tokyo: Magajin Hausu, 1992); cited in Ōtsuka Eiji, "'Bunka eiga' to shite no 'Momotarō umi no shinpei,'" (*Momotaro's Divine Navy* as culture film) in *Shingenjitsu* 4 (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 2007), 115.

7. Abé Mark Nornes, "Pōru Rūta/Paul Rotha and the Politics of Translation," *Screening the Past* 7 (1999), http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr0799/MNfr7c.htm (accessed April 14, 2009).

8. Ōtsuka's essay, "'Bunka' eiga to shite no 'Momotarō umi no shinpei,'" cited earlier, explores the background of the film laws and their effect on culture films and animation.

9. Bōken Dankichi or "Adventurous Dankichi" was the boy hero of a manga (serialized in *Shōnen Kurabu*) who traveled to Japanese possessions in the southern seas, spreading the virtues of civilization in the company of his pet mouse, Karikō. Maabō (or Mabo) was a character, launched in a series of animated films by directors Satō Gijirō and Chiba Yōji, who frequently receives assistance from animal friends in resolving his problems. *Maabō no nankai funsenki* (1942, Record of Mabo's tough fight in the south seas) especially recalls *Momotarō umi no shinpei* in that a battalion of animals comes to Mabo's aid in attacking British warships.

10. For more on Norakuro the Stray Black Dog, see my "Speciesism, Part 1" in *Mechademia* 3: 75–95. Osaru no sankichi appeared as a monkey paratrooper in Seo Mitsuyo's animation of the same title.

11. As also noted in part one, in Haraway's essay entitled "Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience," in *Chasing Technoscience: Matrix for Materiality,* ed. Don Ihde and Evan Selinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), Donna Haraway begins with the provocative thesis that "I have come to see cyborgs as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species" (58–59).

12. Tezuka Osamu, *Janguru taitei,* in *Tezuka Osamu manga zenshū,* vols. 1–3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1977). Hereafter when citing from this manga and others in this edition of Tezuka's collected works, I will cite volume and page numbers. To refer to the first volume and tenth page of *Aporo no uta* (which is volume 35 of the collected manga), for instance, I will cite thus: (35:10).

13. Tezuka Osamu, *Manga seibutsugaku,* in *Tezuka Osamu manga zenshū,* vol. 279 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1984).

14. I am referring here to the solution to the problem of eating well, which in *Madagascar* becomes a matter of eating well without eating one's (animal) friends. The final solution is to eat fish, which are beautifully presented as sushi near the end of the film.

15. Tezuka Osamu, *Aporo no uta,* in *Tezuka Osamu manga zenshū,* vols. 35–37 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1977).

16. For an account of the allegations of Disney borrowing from Tezuka's *Janguru taitei* for *The Lion King,* see Fred Patten, "Simba versus Kimba: The Pride of Lions," in *Illusion of Life II: More Essays on Animation,* ed. Alan Cholodenko (Sydney: Power Publications, 2007), 275–312.

17. In his afterword to the edition of *Rosuto waarudo* in his collected works, Tezuka recounts that he began work on it immediately after he had completed his first long science fiction manga *Yūrei otoko* (Ghost man) in his second year of junior high school. At age

twenty, he revised *Rosuto waarudo* and even began a newspaper serialization of it in 1947 (which he never completed). A complete version of the manga appeared in two volumes from Fuji Shobō on December 20, 1948. See Tezuka Osamu, *Rosuto waarudo shikaden,* in *Tezuka Osamu zenshū,* vols. 360–61 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1982), and *Chiteikoku kaijin,* in *Tezuka Osamu zenshū,* vol. 253 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1982).

18. One early sequence seems to parody the scene in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* in which the young animals learn the first row of the Japanese kana syllabary (a – i – u – e – o): where the young animals in *Momotarō* show exemplary behavior, the animals in *Rosuto waarudo* are unruly and unrestrained.

19. Fujimoto Hiroshi, quoted in *Chiteikoku kaijin* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1994), 309–10; cited in Itō Gō, "*Manga* History Viewed through Proto-Characteristics," trans. Shimauchi Testurō, in *Tezuka: The Marvel of Manga,* ed. Philip Brophy (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2006), 110.

20. Both Lev Manovich, in *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), and Oshii Mamoru, in *Subete no eiga wa anime ni naru* (All film is becoming anime) (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2004), make this argument.

21. For recent accounts of *Kachikujin Yapū* in English, see Takayuki Tatsumi, *Full Metal Apache: Transactions between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), and Christine Marran, "Empire through the Eyes of a Yapoo: Male Abjection in the Cult Classic *Beast Yapoo,*" in *Mechademia* 4 (2009): 259–73.

22. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicoson, 1968). Thanks to Marilyn Ivy for calling this to my attention.

23. Claude Lévi-Strauss speaks to this matter in his essay in *The View from Afar* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), in which he considers the possible genetic advantages of totemic practices.

24. With the understanding that it is impossible to draw a firm distinction, I use the term racialism in contrast to racism, with racialism referring to discourses and practices that presuppose or establish biological differences between races, and racism indicating practices and discourses intent on establishing a hierarchy between races on the basis of biological differences.

25. Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), chapter 2.

26. Natsume Sōseki, *Sōseki zenshū (Collected works of Natsume Sōseki)* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974-76), 13: 43.

27. Tatsumi, in chapter 3 of *Full Metal Apache,* discusses the origins of science fiction in yellow peril literature. In "(Para-)Humanity, Yellow Peril, and the Postcolonial (Arche-) Type," Peter Button talks about the legacy of the parahuman in literature, as related to the yellow peril. *Postcolonial Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006): 421–47.

28. "Conference for the Establishment of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation," 93. Documents found at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/Unesco_1946-1950.shtml (accessed September 2, 2008).

29. Ibid., 27.

30. Ibid., 22.

31. "The Race Question," http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001282/128291eo.pdf (accessed August 18, 2009), 8.

32. The definition derives from Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

33. There are many accounts in English of the wartime debates on "overcoming modernity" (*kindai no chōkoku*), but a good place to start is Richard Calichman's recent translation *Overcoming Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

34. In this essay I am drawing on the definitions of code and axiom in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977). They make a distinction between codes and axioms in that codes properly belong to the State and thus to archaic regimes that persist within capitalism, while axioms are characteristic of capitalism. Nonetheless, codes do not disappear from capitalism; they are at once mobilized and axiomatized. In this essay, with this exception, I refer to speciesism and multispeciesism in terms of codes rather than axioms, because I am not dealing directly with questions of modern capitalism but more with questions of the State. While there is not sufficient space to discuss the matter fully here, I nonetheless have included the term "axiom" as a reminder that these formations of speciesism and the multispecies code are subject to constant deterritorialization and reterritorialization, much as Deleuze and Guattari describe it in the relation between codes and axioms.

35. This is not to say that there were no instances in Japanese wartime cinema of the sort of bestialization of the enemy to which John Dower refers: Akira Kurosawa's *Sanshiro Sugata Part 2* (1945) is one notorious instance, which stands in contrast to *Momotarō umi no shinpei* of the same year.

36. Tezuka Osamu, *Chōjin taikei*, in *Tezuka Osamu zenshū*, vols. 94–95 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980).

37. Mark Selden, "A Forgotten Holocaust: US Bombing Strategy, the Destruction of Japanese Cities, and the American Way of War from World War II to Iraq," *Japan Focus*, May 2, 2007, http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mark-Selden/2414 (accessed April 15, 2009).

38. Tezuka so frequently comments on his experience of an air raid in relation to his depictions of mass destruction in manga that one can find references to it throughout his interviews, in the Tezuka manga biography (produced by Tezuka Productions), and in his essays. For a direct reference in relation to cinema, see the quoted interview with Tezuka in Ōtsuka, "Disarming Atom," 117–18.

39. See Sawaragi Noi's discussion of postwar Japan as a "bad place" in *Nihon—kindai—bijutsu* (Japan—modern—art) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1998). Marilyn Ivy provides a fine account of the right-wing response to the idea of postwar Japan being stuck outside history in a deformed state due to the emphasis on its defeat to ground postwar history, in "In/Comparable Horrors: Total War and the Japanese Thing," in *boundary 2* 32 (2005): 137–49. Finally, I speak to a similar problem in the context of Ootomo Katsuhiro's *Akira* in "Born of Trauma: *Akira* and Capitalist Modes of Destruction," in *War, Trauma, Capital*, special issue of *positions* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 131–56.

40. This is in effect what Sawaragi Noi refers to in his emphasis on postwar Japan as a bad place or bad site. And as his prior work on "simulationism" makes clear, this bad place might be construed as a site where the teleologies of grand narratives fold back on themselves to produce self-referential loops. See the expanded paperback edition of Sawaragi Noi, *Shimyureeshonizumu* (Simulationism), Chikuma bungei bunko 14 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2001).

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KOICHI IWABUCHI

# Undoing Inter-national Fandom in the Age of Brand Nationalism

While studying the "fan" has become well established in media and cultural studies, we need to remember that "fan" is a discursively constructed taxonomy of those who are assumed to share certain cultural attributes. To follow Raymond Williams, we could say: "There are in fact no fans. There are only ways of seeing people as fans."[1] A fundamental feature of the fan might be defined as a passionate devotion to a particular media text or icon, but the term is often used to objectify those people and their activities with an element of judgment, be it negative or positive.

For example, "fan" may negatively connote someone who looks bizarre and unsocial (even a potential criminal), as was the case with *otaku* in Japan. Against such a degrading view, as we know well, serious studies of fan activities and cultures have been developed. Such studies positively reconceptualize those devoted people in terms of their creative consuming and their appropriations of the original texts and icons, activities that blur the assumed boundaries of production and consumption. Thus "fan" could be understood as an imaginative prosumer (producer-consumer) and approreader (appropriator-reader) who does not just passively consume media texts but actively and creatively participates in their cultural signification processes.

WHAT IS AT STAKE IS NOT THE DEGRADATION OR ROMANTICIZATION OF FANS BUT A DISREGARD FOR THE COMPLICATED PROCESSES OF PEOPLE'S MEDIA CULTURE CONSUMPTION.

However, while it successfully overcomes the earlier degrading view, as least academically, this positive reformulation of "fan" exhausts its critical potential when it automatically and uncritically reproduces what "fan" means, who fans are, and what they do, without contextualized field research and a sophisticated understanding of their activities. (This is actually a widely recognized problem with media cultural studies). After all, as this volume aims to contest, the term "fan," even in its positive senses, can easily become a received taxonomic category that preframes our understanding and our research questions in an objectifying manner. Thus some have cautioned that many studies of fans mechanically adopt a ready-made analytical formula that tends to romanticize their creative activities. Some also argue that studies of fan culture are losing their idiosyncratic merit as the line between fan and audience thins and blurs. More and more people now enjoy indulging themselves with a playful commitment to a particular object of media culture, thanks to the development of digital communication technologies and of marketing strategies aimed at niche tastes.

This is not to say that studies of fans and fan culture are no longer significant. The various ways people ardently engage with particular media texts still merit serious academic investigation. But we need to formulate good critical questions at the outset, rather than just reconfirming the creativity of their activities and the pleasure of identity construction. We need a serious consideration of the sociohistorical contexts in which people passionately consume/appropriate media texts, and of the cultural politics and cultural economy involved in their active consuming practices. We must consider issues such as self-empowerment in terms of marginalized identity politics (gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nation, and so on), coping with the tyranny of everyday life in the neoliberal world, the manifestation of a more participatory media culture, and the transnational audience/fan alliance against the control of media culture production and distribution by global media culture industries. Through engagement with such contextualized, critical studies of fan cultures and activities, we could avoid reproducing "fan" as a fixed taxonomy and instead show the significance of understanding committed media culture engagements in everyday life.

In relation to these issues, it seems to me that there is another urgent problem that deters us from undertaking critically contextualized studies that go beyond an objectifying understanding of "fan." It concerns the

inter-nationalized understanding of cross-border flows and consumption of media cultures. Here I put the hyphen between the "inter" and "national" to highlight the reworking and strengthening of the national in tandem with the intensification of cross-border media culture flows. What is at stake here is not the degradation or romanticization of fans but a disregard for the complicated processes of people's media culture consumption. As exemplified by the recent discourses of "cool Japan," which euphorically refer to a passionate reception of Japanese media culture outside Japan, superficial and nationalistic observations that people outside Japan are rejoicing in Japanese media culture are automatically made to testify to the rise of Japanese cool culture in the world. This disengages us from crucial questions about the cross-border circulation and consumption of media culture under uneven processes of globalization, questions about whether and how the consumption of Japanese media culture enhances a deeper understanding of the complexity of Japanese society and culture; whether and how it reproduces one-dimensional, stereotypical views of "Japan" as an organic national-cultural entity; and whether and how power relations operate to divide some groups and keep others intact, instead of promoting a dialogic reflection on self-other relations. I would argue that we need to pay more serious attention to these questions when studying fans as well.

The Euro-American media began paying the increased attention to the phenomena that give credence to "cool Japan." Media reports attested to Japan's increasing cultural influence starting several years ago: "During the 1990s, Japan became associated with its economic stagnation. However, what many failed to realize is that Japan has transformed itself into a vibrant culture-exporting country during the 1990s";[2] "Japan's influence on pop culture and consumer trends runs deep";[3] "Japan is reinventing itself—this time as the coolest nation on Earth."[4] Indeed, both domestically and internationally, Japan's media culture is acclaimed as a global cool culture and Japan as a cultural superpower.[5]

At least since the early 1990s, the rise of Japanese media culture in the global audiovisual markets has engendered the emergence of a "soft" nationalism in Japan—that is, a narcissist discourse on the global (crucially including Europe and the United States) spread of Japanese animation, manga, and video games.[6] The upsurge of such a discourse within Japan in the last several years might not be surprising, especially given that the international advent of Japanese media culture looked to be in sharp contrast to the long-standing Japanese economic slump. The diffusion of Japanese media culture in the world seems to inspire a social and personal lift in Japan.

However, this time Japan's positive response to the American discourse on "Cool Japan" is not just limited to a celebratory nationalistic discourse. It is also accompanied by the active development of national strategies to enhance Japan's "soft power." Starting at the turn of the century, the government began announcing this policy orientation, and many committees have been established that discuss the promotion of Japanese media culture: the Head Office for Intellectual Property Strategy (2002), the Committee for Tourism Nation (2003), the Committee for Info-Communication Software (2003), the Research Committee for Contents Business (2005), the J-Brand Initiative (2003), the e-Japan Strategy (2003), the Council for the Promotion of International Exchange (on the strengthening of cultural dispatch) (2006), and so forth.

This development is actually symptomatic of an international trend, especially among industrialized countries, toward the pragmatic uses of media cultures. We have witnessed the rise of what I would call "brand nationalism"—uncritical, practical uses of media culture as resources for the enhancement of political and economic national interests, through the branding of national cultures. While the nationalist strategy of disseminating culture for national interests is never new, the recent development signifies a global change in terms of the collaborative relationship between the state and media cultural industries, and among culture, economy, and politics. "Cool Britannia" might be the best-known policy and practice for this, but East Asia is included, too. Governments such as those of Korea, Singapore, China, Taiwan, and Japan are keen to promote their own cultural products and industries to further their nations' political and economic interests. For states to maximize national interests and beat international competition, culture has come to be regarded as important politically and economically: politically to enhance "soft power" and "cultural diplomacy," and economically for attracting multinational capital and developing service sectors in which creative industries or content businesses play a significant role.

Such a discourse certainly downplays the serious study of people's activities and cultural politics at the site of consumption. Their actual practices and activities with a particular media culture are reduced to quantitative sales figures and survey results regarding the image of Japan, which work as a convenient alibi to prove the global spread of Japanese media culture and its supposed contribution to bolstering the national image. It is anticipated that media culture will improve the image of Japan to such an extent that the historical memory of Japanese colonialism will be eradicated or softened. The need to export Japanese media culture is even more eagerly discussed with the

recent rise of anti-Japanese feeling in China and Korea over historical and territorial issues. After a recent survey revealed that Korean youth who consume Japanese popular culture tend to feel more empathy with Japan, the imperative to step up the export of media culture to Asian markets has become even more pressing. Needless to say, the history and memory of colonialism cannot be erased by the consumption of media cultures. Historical issues necessitate sincere dialogue as well as the broad involvement of all citizens, and it is this involvement that cultural policy should try to promote.

WE HAVE WITNESSED THE RISE OF WHAT I WOULD CALL "BRAND NATIONALISM"—UNCRITICAL, PRACTICAL USES OF MEDIA CULTURE AS RESOURCES FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC NATIONAL INTERESTS, THROUGH THE BRANDING OF NATIONAL CULTURES.

Some may suspect that brand nationalism should not be taken seriously because it is not substantial or especially effective in enhancing the national image or economic profits, despite what the policy makers contend. Since brand nationalism naively disregards the complexity of transnational media culture's circuit of production, distribution, regulation, and consumption, the suspicion is valid. Thus, rigorous research on how Japanese media culture is variously received and consumed around the world would be valuable for showing the intricacies of intercultural image politics and critique the naive expectations of brand nationalism advocates.

However, there is more politically engaged action to undertake, if we take brand nationalism seriously, and there is good reason to do so. As a dominant (inter-)national discourse, brand nationalism has significant public impact in terms of material institutionalization and funding as well as for comprehending the usefulness of (national) media culture, which insistently and pervasively legitimates a neoliberal mode of inter-nationalism. Put bluntly, brand nationalism deters our understanding of and engagement with uneven processes of cultural globalization: these include the high concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few global companies; intellectual property rights; and the transnational, international, and new international division of cultural labor.[7] Also disregarded are the issues concerning the unevenness, domination, and/or appropriation of "foreign" media culture, intercultural (mis)understanding, and dialogue—both self-reflexive dialogue and dialogue with others. Furthermore, as the new connections forged through inter-national media culture tend to exclude "unprofitable" voices, they suppress the hitherto marginalized voices within the nation by stressing the significance of enhancing national brand images in the inter-national

showground. Thus brand nationalism has a detrimental effect on serious engagement with a sociocultural democratization that can do justice to cultural diversity and promote cross-border dialogues (both nationally and transnationally), because it diverts public attention away from imperative issues that cannot be dealt with in an exclusively market and national framework.[8] We cannot afford to mock brand nationalism as unsubstantial policy discourse or to be engaged in academic investigation in a politically detached manner. Undoing brand nationalism will require critical engagement with its ideological closure.

It might be argued that these issues have little to do with the study of fans, who passionately and creatively consume/appropriate Japanese media culture outside Japan. Others may think that cultural issues are not to be politicized. Indeed, this is one strong critique of media and cultural studies. Yet, as we are now entering the age when states are getting deeply involved in the neoliberal circulation of media and popular culture by collaborating with media culture industries, nothing will be politically neutral. Being supposedly politically neutral will mean colluding overtly and covertly with the uncritical pragmatic uses of media culture for creative industries and cultural diplomacy.

It might also be argued that the most interesting counterpractices and dialogic connections are formed at the grassroots level, so we'd better focus our attention there, rather than being bothered by the dominant international trend. Indeed, it is important to examine and draw attention to such practices and connections, which often go unnoticed by the mainstream. At the same time, however, the significance of such practices and connections cannot be fully understood unless we critically attend to the structuring process of decentering and recentering transnational cultural power relations, relations that eventually constrain our consumption practices in everyday life.[9] The decentering process of globalization makes it impossible to single out the absolute symbolic center that belongs to a particular country or region. However, this does not mean that global cultural power has disappeared; it has been dispersed to the site of local consumption, but at the same time it has been made even more solid. Crucially, the unevenness in transnational cultural flows is intensified by the various kinds of alliances among transnational media industries in developed countries, including non-Western regions. As states strengthen their alliances with (multinational) corporations to enhance national interests, the (re)production of cultural asymmetry and unevenness has become even more institutionalized in the inter-national arena.

In relation to this, we also need to seriously attend to the strengthening of a nation-centered framework, which, in the name of inter-national cultural exchange and understanding, reproduces mutual cultural othering and suppresses the complexity, unevenness, and diversity actually existing within Japan. We have witnessed the development of cultural inter-nationalism, which is facilitated by the trend that "the national" functions as one of the most marketable and significant local units. Through (actual and virtual) participation in the inter-national media culture fiesta, culture has become more and more unquestioningly associated with the national, and transnational encounters are comprehended in terms of mutually exclusive international ones. "Banal nationalism"[10] is actually further institutionalized and promoted by an increase in various kinds of inter-national events and spectacles such as media culture, sports, tourism, and art, all of which encourage a particular kind of encounter with people, goods, and images from many different parts of the world.[11] While we must yet analyze people's complex participation in this inter-national fiesta, I would suggest that strong forces are operating structurally to make people "methodological (inter)nationalists." Methodological nationalism has been seriously criticized in social science because it unambiguously and uncritically regards the nation as the unit of analysis, thus disregarding the diversity and differences within national society, and the transnational connections that cannot be dissociated from it. With the penetration of inter-national media cultural spectacles and the associated policy discourse on the pragmatic uses of media culture for national interests, this national way of thinking and feeling has become internalized and pervasive. It might not be aggressive but it is never innocent, as it essentializes national cultures and their membership, and discourages us from engaging properly with issues that cannot be dealt with in the national framework.

Japan's recent embrace of Korean media cultures is suggestive of the complexity of understanding fans in an inter-national framework. While the masculine mass media insensitively and unreasonably mocks middle-aged women fans who are addicted to Korean love stories and male stars, the passionate way Korean TV dramas are consumed intriguingly suggests the possibilities and the limits of fan activities. On the one hand, it has deeply enhanced cultural understanding and exchange with Korea. The consumption of Korean TV dramas has led to vigorous posttext activities such as learning the Korean language, visiting Korea, and even studying the history of Japanese colonialism. This shows a dialogic possibility that Korean TV dramas enhance by urging (mostly middle-aged) female audiences to engage in active

posttext encounters with Korea—self-critical encounters that change their perceptions of Korea and its colonial history. However, it is questionable whether and how these inter-national dialogic consumption activities have intersected with multicultural and postcolonial issues within Japan. How have the media flows from Korea influenced, both constructively and unconstructively, the social positioning and recognition of resident Koreans in Japan, most of whom are the descendants of people expatriated under Japanese colonial rule? I have discussed this elsewhere by examining audience responses to the first prime-time popular Japanese TV drama to deal with sociohistorical issues surrounding resident Koreans.[12] While the social recognition of resident Koreans has improved greatly as the Korean Wave betters the image of Korea, the historically embedded experiences of resident Koreans have tended to be ignored. Instead, they are effortlessly associated with the culture and people of South Korea in a way that subsumes postcolonial and multicultural issues under the rubric of inter-national relations. Studies of fans of Korean TV dramas in Japan show more than just the mass media's objectification of fans; they show the dialogic possibility of fans' creative and active engagement with media texts but also the way nationally marginalized voices are subsumed under inter-national relations.

Thus, studies of fans should attend to how the persisting dominance of the neoliberal and (inter-)national framework has limited the development of transnational dialogues. If we take various people's active engagement with media cultures seriously, we should strive to make sense of the complexity of uneven processes of transnational cultural circulation, and the cultural imagination's reinscription of exclusive national boundaries that inhibit transgressive dialogue and a denationalized cultural understanding.

Certainly many studies have seriously engaged the complications of media culture globalization, but, as critical cultural researchers, we could do much more to go beyond and undo the research perspective of "inter-national fandom," which neglects much (the unevenness and complexity of transnational cultural connections, the operation of political and economic power relations in the realm of culture, and the strengthening of methodological nationalism) through its inter-national framework for analyzing transnational cultural flows. In the last decade or so, we have indeed seen much intriguing work that discusses how "cool Japan" cultures are received in different parts of the world; yet other work (work that just introduces and describes pleasurable fan activities such as cosplay and creative rereading/appropriation of original media texts for personal fulfillment in the name of identity formation) still tends to neglect critical questions about the structural forces of

cultural globalization and about what fans' creative media practices fail to achieve in terms of promoting self–other dialogue.

We have also witnessed a drastic increase in courses teaching Japanese media and popular culture, but often these courses do not critically question the power relations that operate in globalization processes and within Japanese society. Such a curriculum might end up creating another depoliticized, contained image of Japan. This suggests a need to work together to develop well-formulated public pedagogy to enhance mutual understanding and dialogue by using media and popular culture texts more creatively. Recently the pioneering scholar of fan culture Henry Jenkins pointed out the significance of the "pop cosmopolitanism" that results from using media culture texts in the classroom.[13] But we cannot be optimistic that such perceptions will automatically develop through (creative) media consumption. There has to be a more determined, well-designed pedagogical program to capitalize on the dialogic potential in the uses of media culture.

In sum, the best tool to undo brand nationalism (with its thoughtless disregard for the complexity of people's media practices and its deterrence of cross-border dialogues) is a critical consideration of media culture consumption, contextualized within a wider sociohistorical process of uneven globalization and considered in light of its uses for the advancement of a public pedagogy that contributes toward cross-border dialogues. And this is also the best tool to contest the taxonomic containment of the fan in media and cultural studies. After all, we researchers do not just construct a particular way of seeing the fan but also a particular way of studying fan cultures. We should be a bit more ambitious, taking the current situation as a good opportunity to develop the critical study of fan cultures and their activities, and to be more actively involved in critical public pedagogy.

## Notes

1. Raymond Willams famously states, "There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses." *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 289.

2. Cited by the Director of Japan Information Center Kazuhiro Koshikawa's speech at the City University of New York Graduate Center, December 12, 2003, http://www.ny.us.emb-japan.go.jp/en/c/vol_11-5/title_01.html.

3. Christopher Palmeri and Nanette Byrnes, "Is Japanese Style Taking Over the World?" *Business Week,* July 26, 2004.

4. Anthony Faiola, "Japan's Empire of Cool," *Washington Post,* December 27, 2003.

5. As was the case with the Western Orientalist gaze in the construction of Japanese national identity, the above-mentioned American observations are still crucial for the

confirmation of the "cool Japan" phenomena within Japan. As with traditional culture such as *ukiyoe,* Western appreciation has power to determine the international quality of Japanese culture. The fact that Japanese popular culture has been much more actively and massively received in East Asia has never spurred the same kind of euphoria in Japan. In this sense, "cool Japan" discourse still testifies to Japan's appreciation of the Western Orientalist gaze and its complicit uses of that gaze to enhance national pride both domestically and internationally. Cool Japan, thus, is basically a Western phenomenon. See Koichi Iwabuchi, "Complicit Exoticism: Japan and Its Other," *Continuum* 8, no. 2 (1994): 49–82.

6. Koichi Iwabuchi, "Soft Nationalism and Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global," *Asian Studies Review* 26, no. 4 (2002): 447–69.

7. Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, Richard Maxwell, and Ting Wang, *Global Hollywood 2* (London: British Film Institute, 2005).

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# Patterns of Consumption

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ŌTSUKA EIJI
*Translated and with an Introduction by Marc Steinberg*

# World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION: ŌTSUKA EIJI AND NARRATIVE CONSUMPTION

It would not be an overstatement to suggest that Ōtsuka Eiji is one of the most important writers on anime and manga subcultures in Japan. He has also been one of the most important writers on fan cultures. If the intersection of subcultures and fan cultures is so marked in Japan, it is at least in part because the term *subukaruchaa* in Japan has a different valence than the English term "subculture" as deployed in Anglo-American cultural studies, where it carries the sense of an oppositional culture (as Anne McKnight rightly remarks in her essay in this volume). In Japan it has more the sense of a micromarket segment or even a particular fan culture—hence Japanese criticism uses the formulation "otaku subculture" or "anime/manga subculture" where English-language criticism might more readily use "fandom." The highly varied nature of Ōtsuka's writings stems in part from this particular valence of the term "subculture" in Japan and in part from his own intellectual proclivities, leading him to move from semiotic readings of manga[1] to discussions of media politics,[2] from the cultural ethnography of the shōjo[3] to

the analysis of fan or otaku modes of consumption,[4] and to his rethinking of contemporary Japanese literature.[5]

Moreover, though clearly interested in textual readings of manga in particular, Ōtsuka has also had a long-standing investment in ethnographic modes of analysis. The fascination with ethnography and ethnographic modes of analysis Ōtsuka developed during his undergraduate studies was reignited during his later work as a freelance editor for "lolicon" (*rorikon*) and science fiction comics and videogame magazines. During this time he began to see his editorial work as a kind of "fieldwork" geared toward the development of an "urban ethnography."[6] It was in this vein that Ōtsuka published his first of many critical works of the late 1980s. The essay presented here, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative" ("Sekai to shukō: monogatari no fukusei to shōhi"), is taken from one such work of urban ethnography published in 1989, *Monogatari shōhiron* (A theory of narrative consumption).[7]

In fact it was this critical ethnographic work that led Ōtsuka to develop a strong sense of the consumption patterns of youth and the potential for the further development of what in Japan has been called the "media mix" (analogous to what in North America has been called "transmedia storytelling"). At the time, the concept of the media mix—designating the synergetic combination of multiple media types to promote consumption across commodity forms—was strongly informed by the model of the "blockbuster film–novel–soundtrack" trinity developed by Kadokawa Haruki, then president of Kadokawa Shoten (Kadokawa Books).[8] Yet as the initial success of this model wore off and the massive investment required for the production and promotion of Haruki's films destabilized Kadokawa Shoten, the vice president of the company—Haruki's younger brother Tsuguhiko—developed a different media mix strategy based around targeting niche markets, with a strong interest in the emerging video game market. Ōtsuka's work as an editor for such niche, otaku-oriented magazines and his expressed sense of the potential for a media mix different from that which was promoted by Haruki led him to be hired into what at the time was a subdivision of Kadokawa Shoten.[9] It was here that, working as an editor for Kadokawa, Ōtsuka developed his "theory of narrative consumption."

It was also here that Ōtsuka first put his narrative consumption theory into practice as the writer of the manga–novel–computer game–etc. media mix, *Madara* (1987).[10] He would follow the success of this work with other manga and novels or "light novels" such as the *MPD Psycho* (1997–present, *Tajū jinkaku tantei saiko* or Multipersonality detective psycho) series and

*Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service* (2000–present, *Kurosagi shitai takuhaibin*). This "creative" work or narrative "practice" (as Ōtsuka refers to this work) in turn affected his critical interests. Indeed, Ōtsuka has since been involved in both the writing and the theorization of the light novel—a "new" form of novel that includes numerous illustrations in the style of anime or manga, which many argue defines the broad genre. Ōtsuka's early involvement in the genre also led him to write several how-to books purportedly serving as guides for aspiring light novel writers.[11] In fact these books are as much theories of the light novel (and its relation to the modern Japanese novel) as guides on how to write the books. As such, Ōtsuka occupies the rare position of critic, fiction writer, and how-to-guide author—with each of his facets influencing the others. The essay translated here is of unique interest, as I will suggest, in part because it offers both the result of a particular form of "urban ethnography" of children's media consumption and a foretaste of the niche-oriented media mix narratives Ōtsuka would later develop. But the importance of "World and Variation" also arises from its privileged place in the work of Ōtsuka's younger interlocutor Azuma Hiroki.

Azuma, whose work was introduced in *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire,* is another of the most important theorists of otaku and media cultures in contemporary Japan.[12] He is also profoundly indebted to Ōtsuka insofar as the latter provides a kind of theoretical framework in dialogue with which Azuma develops his own theories of contemporary otaku consumption, the light novel, and the video game. Indeed, we might say that Azuma's two books on otaku and the postmodern are responses to two different works of Ōtsuka. Azuma's first otaku book, *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* (The animalizing postmodern: Otaku and postmodern Japanese society), while heavily indebted to Jean-François Lyotard's suggestion that the postmodern is characterized by the decline of grand narratives, is written in close dialogue with Ōtsuka's suggestion in the essay translated here that consumption is informed by the fragmentary and piece-by-piece attempt to approach a certain totality (which Ōtsuka himself terms "grand narrative") otherwise hidden from view. That these fragments are narrative fragments and this totality a kind of "worldview" developed by and in particular narratives is the reason for the title of the book from which the essay comes, *Monogatari shōhiron* (A theory of narrative consumption). Azuma's second volume, *Geemu teki riarizumu no tanjō: Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan 2* (The birth of game-ic realism: The animalizing postmodern 2)[13] is similarly in dialogue with Ōtsuka's work on the light novel, particularly with the latter's *Kyarakutaa shōsetsu no tsukurikata* (How to make character novels), wherein

Ōtsuka develops the concept of manga/anime realism and suggests that this concept cannot be extended to video games. Azuma's objection to the second part of this statement (i.e., Ōtsuka's suggestion that the concept of manga/anime realism cannot be extended to a consideration of video games) provides the starting point of the second volume of *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan*, just as his dialogue with Ōtsuka's *Monogatari shōhiron* was the starting point for his first volume.

While it is my sense that Azuma could not have written his two volumes of *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan* without the productive dialogue with Ōtsuka's work, it was undoubtedly Azuma's engagement with Ōtsuka's *Monogatari shōhiron* that gave the book—and particularly its core essay translated here—a second life. First republished in *Shōsetsu torippaa* (Novel tripper) in its spring 2001 issue alongside a long conversation between Azuma and Ōtsuka as well as an essay by Azuma, the essay had been out of print since its initial 1989 publication and, hence, as the editors of *Shōsetsu torippaa* note, "difficult to read."[14] The book from which "World and Variation" comes was in fact expanded and republished in paperback by Kadokawa in October 2001 as *Teihon monogatari shōhiron* (A theory of narrative consumption: Standard edition), so it is very much thanks to Azuma's engagement with it in the early 2000s that the essay gained what we can now call its canonical status within manga and anime criticism. As such, this essay is key to evaluating Azuma's work on otaku postmodernity and his transformation of Ōtsuka's theory of narrative consumption, and key also to evaluating work—such as that of Itō Gō—that appeared in their wake. This is the first reason for its importance and for its translation here.

The second reason lies in its fascinating analysis of a particular historical phenomenon: the consumption of "Bikkuriman Chocolates"—candies that came with sticker premiums or freebies bearing the image of and information about a number of different characters. This analysis alone positions this text as a valuable document in the history of the material culture of Japanese children—one that both differentiates the Bikkuriman phenomenon from earlier premium booms (such as Tetsuwan Atomu stickers and Kamen Rider cards) and permits a greater understanding of more recent sticker or card booms. It also suggests, by example, the importance of paying close attention to the relationship between the premium and the candy, and the mode of consumption of candies and their premiums in analyses of children's material culture.

Third, this essay extends the analysis of this phenomenon into a theoretically sophisticated account of "contemporary" consumption more generally. Of course, how contemporary this account will seem to readers depends on

the degree to which they agree with Azuma's argument that this form of consumption has been superseded by a mode of consumption based around the relation between "*moe* element" and database, rather than narrative fragment and totality.[15] While there is certainly much of interest in Azuma's account of consumption today, this author for one believes that Ōtsuka's account has as much explanatory value today as it did when it was initially published in 1989. Indeed, even as he (disparagingly?) characterizes the work as "late 1980s marketing theory" whose "largest readership was among advertising agencies," Ōtsuka himself, in the "Afterword" to the 2001 republication, admits a certain contemporaneity to the work, noting the continuing presence of "narrative consumption" in both television commercials and the media mix strategies used by Kadokawa Shoten.[16] Given the increasing global diffusion of the media mix model—with writers such as Henry Jenkins suggesting its importance for recent Hollywood franchises such as *The Matrix*—this essay offers an important and sophisticated account of how this transmedia storytelling works.[17] Moreover, while there may have been (and continues to be) a sense in which Ōtsuka's work functioned as a kind of handbook to marketing practitioners, it provides a clear sense not only of how this marketing mechanism operates but also of what the critical potentials of inciting the desire for "totality" might be. Indeed, there is a sense in which Ōtsuka's so-called marketing theory functions not unlike the Marxist criticism of writers like Walter Benjamin, insofar as it provides a quasi-utopian analysis of a particular social system (i.e. the society of consumption in which sign value and narrative replace use value) that points to a liberatory and indeed subversive transformation that will develop from within the system itself.

Finally, the attention this essay pays to fan production and consumption—and its implicit suggestion that narrative consumption and the Comic Market (or Komike) host the kernels of an active model of consumption—dovetails with contemporaneous theoretical and ethnographic work in Anglo-American cultural studies that similarly emphasizes the importance of understanding consumers as active creators rather than passive receptors of media forms.[18] As such, this essay can be read in relation to a larger academic trend toward the rethinking of the position of the consumer in the 1980s and 1990s, and offers a glimpse of how these changes were conceptualized by one of the more interesting Japanese critics to emerge at that time.

For the interest of this work in its own right and for its importance in orienting the English-language reader in contemporary debates around anime, manga, the otaku, and contemporary consumption in Japan, I am thrilled to present a translation of what has come to be one of the most important texts

in Ōtsuka's oeuvre, and indeed one of the more influential texts in anime/manga studies in Japan. There are certain aspects of this essay that bear witness to its age—for example the reference to Baudrillard and his theorization of the society of mass consumption in terms of the consumption of pure signs, a theory that was all the rage in 1980s Japan.[19] And I cannot pretend that this work is beyond fault or without its share of theoretical inconsistencies, which I leave the reader free to evaluate. Yet at the same time my sense is that this essay has aged remarkably well. Like so much of Ōtsuka's work, this essay displays a slightly casual or off-hand manner and yet it also sparkles with insight and even flashes of intuitive genius that have allowed it to outlive its time and its object of study, as well as its more recent critiques. It is my hope that this translation will enable current fans and theorists of manga, anime, and media mix culture to better critically grasp the power of narrative consumption in contemporary Japan and beyond, and perhaps even to incorporate Ōtsuka's insights into their own creative and critical practices.

## WORLD AND VARIATION: THE REPRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF NARRATIVE

Jean Baudrillard's assertion that within today's consumer society what people consume are not physical "things" that have a use value but rather "*things*" as signs has clearly become the felt reality for those of us who live in late 1980s Japan.[20] We are all too conscious of this state of affairs where the *things* in front of our eyes exist only as signs and where it's impossible for them to have any other kind of value.[21] Indeed, we even have the sense that it would be strange to expect any kind of use value from *things*.

We might say that Bikkuriman Chocolates (Bikkuriman Chokorēto), an explosively popular hit among children through the years 1987 and 1988, is a representative commodity in this regard.[22] It was all too clear that the children consumers and the candy-making producer were both in complete agreement that Bikkuriman Chocolates' "chocolate" had absolutely no value as a food product. When buying Bikkuriman Chocolates, children took out the "Bikkuriman sticker" and threw the chocolate away without hesitation. Despite having the word "chocolate" in its name and despite this being at least formally the main product (*hontai*), the chocolates of the Bikkuriman Chocolates commodity were completely unnecessary.[23]

Granted all candy makers strove to differentiate their products. Yet even as candy makers released things that seemed to deviate from their original use

value as food, like outrageously spicy snacks, "cute" candies garnished with the shapes of animals, and so on, all the same these candy makers fiercely defended the premise that these snacks would in the end wind up in the mouths of their consumers. Super-spicy foods could only be felt to be spicy once they were eaten, and cute candies could only remain commodities so long as their consumers—even as they exclaimed, "Oh they're too cute, I can't eat them"—ate them. Even those candies in the "premium-included" (*omaketsuki*) format never denied the use value (nutrition) of their main product: the candy. We find the best expression of this in the classic copy phrase of the original premium-included candy, Glico: "Three hundred meters in one tablet."[24] On the other hand, in the case of Bikkuriman Chocolates, the product took the form of "chocolate" for the sole reason that its producer was a candy maker and of necessity sold the products by riding on the food distribution line. The main product of the commodity was the sticker; the chocolate was only there to play the role of a medium (i.e., a container for the sticker).

Well then, if Bikkuriman Chocolates dispensed with the use value of chocolate, what on earth was the object of consumption of these *things*? Since children were feverishly collecting the sticker premiums, common sense would lead us to think that the answer would be the stickers. To be sure, that answer would be correct if we were talking about the case of the Kamen Rider Snacks [Kamen Raidaa Sunakku or Masked Rider Snacks]—when, from 1971 through 1974, children similarly threw the snacks away and collected only the card premiums, a phenomenon that was treated as a social problem and eventually led to the forced stoppage of production. With Kamen Rider Snacks the device introduced in order to differentiate this snack from others ended up negating the commodity's original use value (as a food product) while this device (the sticker) alone took off and became the main product of the commodity.[25]

However, the systems of consumption of Kamen Rider Snacks and Bikkuriman Chocolates are decisively different. In the case of Kamen Rider Snacks, characters from manga writer Ishinomori Shintarō's live-action special effects (*tokusatsu*) drama *Kamen Rider* adorned its packages. This phenomenon of adding value to a product by riding on the coattails of characters from television and manga popular with children is the most classic method of differentiating one product from another, and in no way or form is it unusual. However, in the case of Bikkuriman Chocolates, there was no original television series or comic—and therein lies its decisive difference from Kamen Rider Snacks. To be sure, there are anime and comic versions of Bikkuriman, but these are secondary commodities produced after Bikkuriman

Chocolates became a hit product. In other words, there was no original work that Bikkuriman Chocolates could ride on the coattails of—as Kamen Rider Snacks had done. It is here that we find the singularity of the Bikkuriman commodity.

What, then, was the motivation that led children to go crazy over Bikkuriman and scoop up its chocolates? The following are the devices built into Bikkuriman (this repeats what I have written elsewhere):

1. Every sticker contained the drawing of one character. On the reverse side of the sticker there was a short bit of information called "Rumors of the Devil World," describing the character drawn on the front of the sticker.

2. With one sticker alone this information amounted to little more than noise. But once the child had collected a number of them and put them together, the child began to vaguely see a "small narrative" emerging—the rivalry between characters A and B, the betrayal of D by C, and so on.

3. This unexpected appearance of narrative functioned as a trigger to accelerate children's collection.

4. Moreover, with the accumulation of these small narratives, a "grand narrative" reminiscent of a mythological epic appeared.

5. Child consumers were attracted by this grand narrative, and tried to gain further access to it through the continued purchase of chocolates.

Since I will go into the specifics of the content of Bikkuriman's grand narrative later in this book I will not explain it here,[26] but suffice to say it is an expansive mythological chronicle reminiscent of Deguchi Onisaburō's *Reikai monogatari* (Tales of the spirit world) and the Indian epic poem *Mahābhārata*. In order to gain hold of the system of this grand narrative, child consumers purchased stickers, which were the differential fragments of information. Therefore, what the candy maker was "selling" to children was neither the chocolates nor the stickers, but rather the grand narrative itself.

By comparison, Kamen Rider Snacks were merely selling stickers—based on a character from a popular TV program—that rode on the main product of the candy snacks.[27]

This strange form of consumption can in fact be seen particularly clearly in the commodities of comics and anime or even toys that have children as

their objects. Be they comics or toys, these commodities are not themselves consumed. Rather, what is consumed first and foremost, and that which first gives these individual commodities their very value, is the grand narrative or order (*chitsujo*) that they hold in partial form and as their background.[28] Moreover, it is by convincing consumers that through the repetition of this very act of consumption they grow closer to the totality of the grand narrative that the sales of countless quantities of the same kind of commodity become possible (in the case of the Bikkuriman stickers there were 772 in total). *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979–present, *Kidō senshi Gandamu*), *Saint Seiya* (*1986–89, Seinto Seiya*), Sylvanian Families (*1987, Shirubania famirii*), Onyanko Kurabu[29]—all of these commodities followed this mechanism by setting up their grand narrative or order in the background in advance and by tying the sales of concrete *things* to consumers' awareness of this grand narrative.

CHILD CONSUMERS PURCHASED STICKERS, WHICH WERE THE DIFFERENTIAL FRAGMENTS OF INFORMATION. THEREFORE, WHAT THE CANDY MAKER WAS "SELLING" TO CHILDREN WAS NEITHER THE CHOCOLATES NOR THE STICKERS, BUT RATHER THE GRAND NARRATIVE ITSELF.

But what is this grand narrative or order that supports commodities from the background?

In the field of animation it is what is known as the "worldview." For example, if we were to compare this to *Mobile Suit Gundam,* one episode or one series of the anime would be a fragmentary commodity, corresponding to the sticker. Within a *Gundam* episode or series, the official narrative will be told through a main character such as Amuro or Char.[30] The general viewing audience will only watch for this "official narrative." However what the anime producers are making is not only this single narrative episode. Within a single episode there are countless detailed "settings" prepared yet not directly represented within this episode, including, in the case of *Gundam,* the era in which the main characters live, the place, the relations between countries, their history, their manners of living, the personal histories of the respective characters, the nature of their interpersonal relations, and even, in the case of the robots, the concordance between the functions matching their design and the science of the era. The greater the number of settings prepared, the greater the sense among audience members that the drama of each episode is real. The ideal is that each one of these individual settings will as a totality form a greater order, a united whole. This accumulation of settings into a single totality is what people in the animation field are accustomed to calling the "worldview." So, when seen from the perspective of the totality called

the worldview, the official drama of a concrete single episode or single series of an anime program becomes merely the extraction of a series of events that occurred during a specified period around a single individual arbitrarily chosen to be the central character from within this large world. Theoretically speaking, this also means that countless other dramas could exist if someone else were made the central character.

This will perhaps be easiest to understand if it is compared to a computer game. The totality of the data programmed into one video game would correspond to the worldview. The term "program" can be defined as the order, understood as the totality of all the possibilities that can be recalled from within the world that exists enclosed within a particular video game. By contrast to this, each individual drama corresponds to one game play. Each individual "play" using the same video game will offer up a different development depending on the player and the game. One episode of *Gundam* corresponds to one game play; the possibility exists that a different narrative will appear, depending on the player.

The general consumers we have been discussing thus far have been satisfied with the consumption of the drama developed within one game play. The grand narrative (or worldview) found in the background has been, much like the video game program, an essentially invisible existence and not an attribute seen by the eyes of the game's consumers. However, the anime otaku (*mania*), using information outside that found in the drama of each individual episode as a clue, has tried to dig out the worldview hidden in the background.[31] When we look at special issue *mooks* based around a specific anime, we find a wealth of data on its setting that doesn't appear on the surface of the work but that comes via the inference of otaku based on the television broadcast of the images as well as on supplements necessary to their own way of reconstituting the worldview.[32] Similarly, the creation of video game strategy guides and game-world maps also bears witness to the behavior of a consumer intent on revealing the hidden program. Early video game otaku put their utmost into discovering programming errors referred to as "bugs" or "cheats" (*urawaza*). For example, one of the cheats in *Super Mario Brothers* involved turning the main character Mario around. This cheat or rupture in the program could only be inferred once the player had grasped the fact that in the proper program, Mario was always supposed to be facing sideways. Early anime otaku also feverishly sought the points of

WHAT IS BEING CONSUMED IS NOT AN INDIVIDUAL DRAMA OR THING BUT THE SYSTEM ITSELF THAT WAS SUPPOSEDLY CONCEALED IN THE BACKGROUND.

contradiction internal to the drama. Yet this interest in programming errors necessarily led them toward an interest in the totality of the program.

While all was fine and well when this interest in the program itself was limited to particular otaku, we are now in a situation where this interest is becoming the common sense of all consumers of anime, comics, and toys. It is here that we can glimpse the new phase today's consumer society is entering. What is being consumed is not an individual drama or *thing* but the system itself that was supposedly concealed in the background. However since it's quite impossible to sell the system (i.e., the grand narrative) itself, consumers are *tricked* into consuming a single cross-section of the system in the form of one episode of the drama, or a single fragment of the system in the form of a *thing*. I would like to call this state of affairs "narrative consumption."

Probably everyone has a vague sense of this state of affairs in which this thing called a commodity is consumed in relation to "narrative." However, as we have seen, two kinds of narrative coexist within today's stage of consumption, and consumption takes place in reciprocal relation to both of these. By two kinds of narrative I refer to, on the one hand, the "small narrative" as the concrete commodity or single episode of a drama, and the "worldview," "program," or "system" that in this work I've been calling the "grand narrative." What we have been consuming until now has only been the former, the small narrative. However, as the Bikkuriman phenomenon has made clear, the new consumer is in the process of incorporating the grand narrative as an object of consumption. That said, since it is almost impossible to make the grand narrative itself into a concrete commodity, what is being consumed is the grand narrative in its differential and fragmented "small narrative" commodity form. The difference in the form of consumption between Kamen Rider Snacks and Bikkuriman Chocolates lies in this very point.

However, the commodity that takes such a "narrative consumption" as its premise has an extremely dangerous side to it. That is to say, if, at the end of the accumulated consumption of small narratives, consumers get their hands on the grand narrative (i.e. the totality of the program), they will then be able to freely produce their own small narratives with their own hands. Let's think of the following case as an example. If someone were to reproduce a single one of the 772 Bikkuriman stickers starting with "SuperZeus"[33] without the permission of the copyright-holding candy maker, this would be a crime. A sticker produced in this manner would be a "counterfeit." There have already been countless incidents like this. However, if this same person were to create a 773rd character not found among the 772 stickers, yet consistent with them and following the Bikkuriman worldview, and if this person were

to sell this character as a sticker, what would happen then? This would not be a reproduction of any of the existing 772 existing stickers. Consequently, in this sense it would not be a counterfeit. Moreover, seeing as this 773rd sticker would be consistent with the 772 others, it would have the same value as the 772 originals. Within this phase of narrative consumption, cases such as this one arise wherein we are no longer capable of distinguishing whether a given commodity is "real" or "counterfeit."

In fact, this state of affairs is not merely hypothetical but has already become our reality. The genre of work called *Tsubasa dōjinshi* is a case in point.[34] There was once a soccer manga called *Captain Tsubasa (1981–88, Kyaputen Tsubasa)*, which was serialized by Takahashi Yōichi in the magazine *Shōnen Jump*. Originally made for boys, it became a great hit and was turned into an anime series and a video game. The book release of the manga sold more than a million copies.

However, at some point girls in their late teens began writing and self-publishing *dōjinshi* that used the main character from *Captain Tsubasa,* and this phenomenon expanded across the country in the blink of an eye. Hundreds, even thousands of these *Tsubasa dōjinshi* have been produced, and famous *dōjinshi* can sell upward of ten thousand copies per volume. These girls have used the *Tsubasa* characters and their human relations to create and sell their respective *Captain Tsubasas*.

It would be incorrect to call these girls' works "parodies." A parodic work is one that depends on the existence of a strong original work toward which it then holds an ironic, mocking, or parodic stance. However, these girls extracted the *Tsubasa* "program" from Takahashi Yōichi's *Captain Tsubasa* and wrote their respective *Tsubasas* by following the order of this program in their own individual, creative ways. For these girls, the original work was merely the raw material from which to extract the *Tsubasa* program. Once the program was in the hands of these girls, the original work itself became merely one possible drama that appeared from within the larger framework of the program. Moreover, since these girls stressed the relations between boys within *Tsubasa* when extracting the program and then exaggerated these relationships further, the *Tsubasa dōjinshi*'s characters became entirely different from those of the original work. This is a state of affairs that is subtly different from what is called plagiarism or piracy. The program called *Tsubasa* was itself hidden in the original writer's work. But it was countless amateur writers who extracted this as a program and then, following this, wrote *dōjinshi* versions of *Tsubasa*. The concrete examples of *dōjinshi* "works" were at the very least not instances of plagiarism. Seemingly taking advantage of this ambiguous

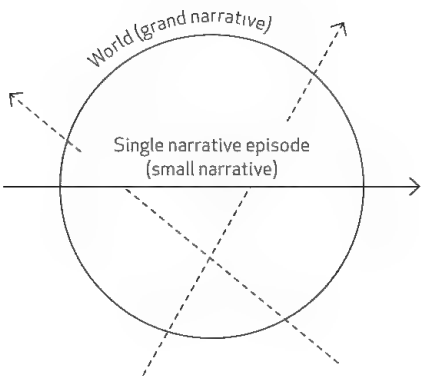
situation, several publishing houses based around the commercial publication of *dōjinshi* versions of *Tsubasa* appeared and subsequently got into trouble with Shūeisha, the copyright holder of the "original work."

Putting debates around copyright law aside, what is quite interesting about the Tsubasa dōjinshi is that this is not at all an unusual state of affairs, when put in the light of the history of Japanese narrative creation. In Kabuki and Japanese puppet theatre (*ningyō jōruri*) we can clearly detect a similar sensibility in which the competence or originality of an author is judged by examining the appearance of various small narratives from a shared grand narrative. Within the terminology of Kabuki there is the concept of "world" that has almost the exact same meaning as the term "worldview" within the anime industry. Here I will quote from the "world" entry in Hattori Yukio et al.'s *Kabuki jiten* (Kabuki dictionary):

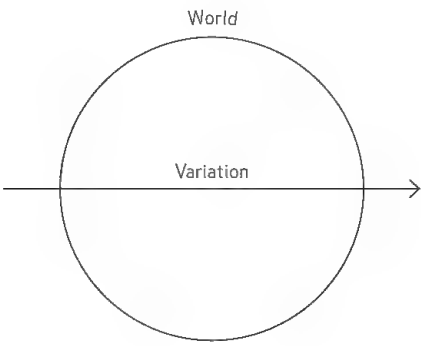
> *Sekai* (world): Terminology specific to Kabuki and puppet theatre (*ningyō jōruri*). A concept that refers to the historical era or events that constitute the background of the work. In fact this concept includes everything from the names of the characters that appear in the work to the basic personality traits of these characters, the nature of their relations, the basic storyline, the basic aspects and developments that should be dramatized, and so on. While this "world" is mostly founded on the commonly known popular history of Japan, oral traditions, and so on, it also contains generic content developed through the repeated dramatic adaptations and performances in the form of preceding Kabuki and Japanese puppet theatre as well as medieval performing arts, and thus it does not necessarily refer to any established sourcebook or original text. Therefore, each individual "world" is not a permanent or unchanging thing; some new "worlds" emerge and others fall into disuse and remain in name alone as a result of the formation of genres as well as the fashions of the time. The authors thus create their works by dramatizing newly invented "variations" that are based on a particular world, which is commonly known to the actors and their audiences, or by mixing multiple "worlds."[35]

As we can see here, the term "world" has the same meaning as "worldview" or "grand narrative," and each individual small narrative corresponds to the term "variation." There even existed among Kabuki authors something like a crib called the *Sekai kōmoku* (World catalogue). Thus in Kabuki the talent of an author was judged by the particular excellence of their ability to cut out a variation from this world and perfect a single theatrical work (Figure 1).

**1.** Worldview and single narrative episode (as circle and intersecting lines, that is, there are countless narratives)




**2.** The parameters of the Kabuki world (within which countless variations or varients exist)




**3.** The original work and its parodies are of equal value as "variations"

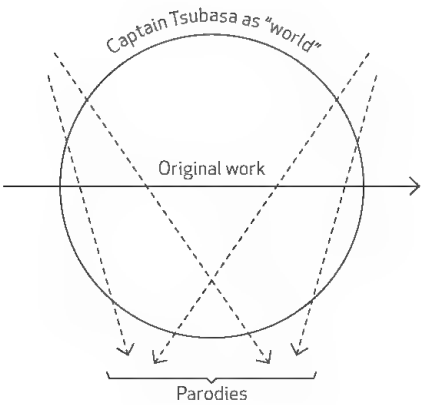



**FIGURE 1.** The relations between worldviews and narratives.

The works of *Tsubasa dōjinshi* prescribed the world of *Captain Tsubasa* on which different girls brought their own creativity to bear in making their own variations. Understood within the framework of the world/variation axis, the only effective standard of judgment for the countless *Tsubasa* works—including Takahashi Yōichi's main branch of *Tsubasa* works—becomes not which of these is the original work (a question that becomes meaningless) but rather the relative merit of each variation.

In this way, at the same time as narrative consumption motivates the excessive consumption of the kind shown by the desperate child consumers of Bikkuriman stickers, it also bears within it the possibility of a new stage wherein consumers themselves begin to create commodities and consume them on their own terms. At this future point in time, the commodity producers [*okurite*; literally "senders"] will become excluded from the system of consumption and will no longer be able to manage the commodities they themselves had originally produced. For this reason, the final stage of narrative consumption points to a state of affairs wherein making a commodity and consuming it merge into one. There will no longer be manufacturers.[36] There will merely be countless consumers who make commodities with their own hands and consume them with their own hands. Let us be clear here: this would mark the closing scene of the consumer society that saw the endless play of *things* as signs.

## Notes

1. See, for instance, Ōtsuka's *Sengo manga no hyōgen kūkan* (The expressive space of postwar manga) (Kyoto: Hōsōkan, 1994) and *Atomu no meidai: Tezuka Osamu to sengo manga no shudai* (The Atomu thesis: Tezuka Osamu and the main theme of postwar manga) (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2003). *Mechademia* 3 includes a recent essay by Ōtuska that gives an excellent sense of the political dimensions of his manga criticism and has some overlap with *Atomu no meidai*. See "Disarming Atom: Tezuka Osamu's Manga at War and Peace," trans. Thomas LaMarre, *Mechademia* 3 (2008): 111–25.

2. See in particular the articles collected in Ōtsuka Eiji, *Sengo minshu shugi no rihabiriteeshon* (The rehabilitation of postwar democracy) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 2005 [2001]).

3. Ōtsuka Eiji, *Shōjo minzokugaku* (An ethnography of the shōjo) (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1989); Ōtsuka, *Tasogaredoki ni mitsuketa mono: "Ribon" no furoku to sono jidai* (Things found at twilight: "Ribon" premiums and their age) (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 1991).

4. Ōtsuka Eiji, *"Otaku" no seishinshi: 1980 nendairon* (A history of the "otaku" mind: On the 1980s) (Tokyo: Asahi Bunko, 2007 [2004]).

5. *Sabukaruchuaa bungakuron* (A theory of subculture literature) (Tokyo: Asahi Bunko, 2007 [2004]).

6. Ōtsuka Eiji, *Shisutemu to gishiki* (System and ritual) (Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 1992 [1988]), 333.

7. Ōtsuka Eiji, "Sekai to shukō: Monogatari no fukusei to shōhi" (World and variation: The reproduction and consumption of narrative), translated from the 2001 republished edition, *Teihon monogatari shōhiron* (A theory of narrative consumption: Standard edition) (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2001 [1989]). *Monogatari shōhiron* can alternatively be translated as "a theory of narrative consumption" or as "on narrative consumption." While the latter translation has been the preferred one, considering Ōtsuka's remarks about the work in his 2001 "Afterword" and elsewhere, in which he describes the book as a work of theory (*riron*)—even if merely "marketing theory"—I opted to include "theory" in the title. Two other "urban ethnography" books by Ōtsuka from the same period are *Shisutemu to gishiki* (1988) and *Shōjo minzokugaku* (1989), cited earlier.

8. The best account of Kadokawa Haruki's media strategy is to be found in Yamakita Shinji's *Kadokawa Haruki no kōzai: Shuppankai, eigakai o yurugaseta otoko* (The merits and demerits of Kadokawa Haruki: The man who shook up the publishing world and the film world) (Tokyo: Tōkyō Keizai, 1993).

9. Ōtsuka Eiji, "Boku to Miyazaki Tsutomu no '80 nendai, #17: Komikku to media mikkusu" (Miyazaki Tsutomu and my 1980s, #17: Comics and the media mix), *Shokun!* (April 1999): 264–69. For an account of the differences between Kadokawa Haruki and Tsuguhiko's media mixes that agrees with Ōtsuka's assessment, see Shinoda Hiroyuki's "'Daisōran' hete Kadokawa Shoten: Shin taisei no 'zento'" (Kadokawa Shoten has gotten through the "great unrest": An "outlook" on the new system), *Tsukuru* (May 1993): 70–82.

10. Ōtsuka, "Boku to Miyazaki Tsutomu no '80 nendai, #17" (Miyazaki Tsutomu and my 1980s, #17), 269; Ōtsuka Eiji and Azuma Hiroki, "Hihyō to otaku to posutomodan," (Criticism, otaku, and postmodernity), *Shōsetsu torippaa* (Spring 2001): 7.

11. See in particular Ōtsuka Eiji, *Kyarakutaa shōsetsu no tsukurikata* (How to make character novels) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003).

12. Azuma Hiroki, "The Animalization of Otaku Culture," trans. Yuriko Furuhata and Marc Steinberg, with an introduction by Thomas LaMarre, *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 175–87. As LaMarre indicates in his introduction, this essay introduces the basic ideas of Azuma's book *Dōbutsukasuru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* (Animalizing Postmodern: Otaku and postmodern Japanese society) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001); translated by Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono as *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). In the text I've given a slightly more literal translation of Azuma's title than Abel and Kono's, to highlight the links between Azuma's two otaku books and theories of the postmodern.

13. Azuma Hiroki, *Geemuteki riarizumu no tanjō: Dōbutsukasuru posutomodan 2* (The Birth of Game-ic Realism: The Animalizing Postmodern 2) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2007).

14. Ōtsuka Eiji and Azuma Hiroki, "Hihyō to otaku to posutomodan," (Criticism, otaku, and postmodernity). *Shōsetsu torippaa* (Spring 2001): 2–33. This dialogue has been recently republished (with some unfortunate edits) in a collection of dialogues between Ōtsuka and Azuma, *Riaru no yukue: Otaku [おたく]/otaku [オタク] wa dō ikiru ka* (The whereabouts of the Real: How do Otaku/otaku live?) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2008). For the editors' remarks, see "Henshūsha kōki," ("Editors' postscript"). *Shōsetsu torippaa* (Spring 2001): 240.

15. Once again I refer the reader to Azuma's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* and the translation of a brief essay that recapitulates some of its arguments, "The Animalization of Otaku Culture," in *Mechademia* 2.

16. Ōtsuka, *Teihon monogatari shōhiron,* 323, 326. In Ōtsuka's discussion with Azuma first published in *Shōsetsu torippaa,* he similarly suggests that *Monogatari shōhiron* was "marketing theory written in order to make inroads into Kadokawa Shoten and Dentsū," the latter being Japan's largest advertising agency. He also positions Azuma's work as mere marketing theory. Ōtsuka and Azuma, "Hihyō to otaku to posutomodan," 15, and Ōtsuka and Azuma, *Riaru no yukue,* 37.

17. For Jenkins's account of transmedia storytelling, see his description of the *Matrix* franchise in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

18. This approach is perhaps best represented by the work of John Fiske in, for example, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987).

19. Ōtsuka himself notes that it was this "shameless" use of the then popular semiotic approach that led him to resist republishing this book until 2001. Ōtsuka, *Teihon monogatari shōhiron,* 319.

20. I am rendering Ōtsuka's opposition between 物 (*mono,* "things") and モノ (*mono,* in italics as "*things*"), which in this context refers to things as material objects (物) versus things as pure signs (モノ). Ōtsuka does not give a citation for the Baudrillard work to which he refers, but Baudrillard's "sign value" theory of consumption (wherein the value of a thing comes from its place in a system of signs rather than from some inherent "use" found in the material object) is found in his *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures,* trans. Chris Turner (London: Sage, 1998), and *The System of Objects,* trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996). Both of these Baudrillard texts were highly influential at the time of Ōtsuka's writing, and Ōtsuka himself explicitly refers to them in other works, for instance "Shōhi shakairon saikō" (1994, Rethinking society of consumption theory) republished in Ōtsuka Eiji, *Sengo minshu shugi no rihabiriteeshon* (The rehabilitation of postwar democracy) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 2005 [2001]), 288–309. This and all other notes are by the translator.

21. Aside, of course, from their purely relational "sign value."

22. Bikkuriman Chokoreeto might be literally translated as "Surprise Man Chocolates."

23. While *hontai* usually means "main body," given the context I am translating it as "main product." For the term *shōhin* I am reserving the term "commodity."

24. As Glico's "running man" mascot indicates, its ad copy means that you could run three hundred meters after eating one tablet or grain of Glico's caramel. Glico included its first premium in the 1920s. I am translating *omake* as "premiums"; other translations could be "giveaways" or "freebies." For more on premiums and candy, see the collection of essays, *Kodomo no Shōwa shi: Omake to furoku daizuhan* (A Children's history of the Showa period: An illustrated book of *omake* and *furoku*) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1999).

25. Presumably in this sentence where Ōtsuka writes "sticker" he means "card," since the Kamen Rider Snacks revolved around the collection of cards, not stickers. Incidentally a very similar inversion occurred in the first case of a sticker premium in Japan, Meiji Seika's Tetsuwan Atomu–based sticker campaign of 1963–66.

26. That is, *Monogatari shōhiron,* to which this piece serves as an introductory essay.

27. In fact, what Kamen Rider Snacks were selling weren't stickers but cards, as Ōtsuka properly notes in the earlier part of this essay.

28. *Chitsujo,* here translated as "order," refers not to the "order of events" as a temporal succession but rather the "law and order" sense of the term.

29. *Seinto Seiya* (written *Seitoshi Seiya* in the kanji) is a manga and anime series; Sylvanian Family is a line of plush toys; and Onyaku Kurabu (literally "Kitten Club") is an all-girls idol group from the 1980s.

30. Amuro and Char are two of the main characters appearing across multiple *Gundam* series.

31. While Ōtsuka uses the term "*anime mania*"—which we might translate as anime fanatic or maniac—rather than "anime otaku," I employ the latter term since this is the one most in use today and corresponds with the term mania in use at the time of Ōtsuka's writing, in the late 1980s.

32. A "mook" is a cross between a magazine and book. Mooks are usually information-heavy books based around a particular subject.

33. The first Bikkuriman sticker character.

34. *Dōjinshi* are fan-written and fan-distributed works, mainly manga, novels, or video games, based on an existing manga or anime series.

35. Ikegami Fumio, "Sekai," in *Kabuki jiten* (Kabuki dictionary), ed. Hattori Yukio, Tomita Tetsunosuke, and Hirosue Tamotsu (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1983).

36. Ōtsuka is distinguishing here between individual producers who make (*tsukuru* or *tsukuridasu*) their own products and companies or manufacturers (*seisansha*) that mass manufacture their products.

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ANNE McKNIGHT

# Frenchness and Transformation in Japanese Subculture, 1972–2004

The 2004 film *Shimotsuma monogatari* (Shimotsuma story; translated in English as *Kamikaze Girls*) opens with a voiceover.[1] It longingly describes an era long derided, when not neglected, for its vulgarity and excess: the rococo court life of eighteenth-century Versailles (Figure 1). The 2002 novel, on which *Shimotsuma monogatari* is based, embraces the rococo, using the very terms French philosopher Denis Diderot had employed two centuries earlier. Then, Diderot had spurned the paintings of François Boucher by saying they feature only "elegance, cloying sweetness, fantastic gallantry, coquetry, virtuosity, change, brilliance, made-up skin tones, and lewdness."[2] Anticlassical and pro-rococo to the core, *Shimotsuma monogatari* tells the story of two girls: Momoko, a hyperindividualist rococo-phile, and Ichigo, a biker girl who travels with a pack, who form an unlikely friendship in a less-than-idyllic countryside in millennial Japan. In this article, I want to trace the path of the baroque and rococo aesthetics in postwar Japanese subculture. I do so by using the film and novel versions of *Shimotsuma monogatari* interchangeably, with some additional passages of the novel that offer art-historical meditations on the resemblances between subcultures. My goal is to suggest how and why the 1970s emergence of shōjo manga (girls' comics) as well as the millennial

street fashion of gothic Lolitas featured in *Shimotsuma monogatari,* reprise the logic of the rococo, the hallmark of the seventeenth–to-eighteenth-century "consumer revolution" that provided women an entry into the marketplace during the transition from a feudal to a bourgeois regime. How does a baroque or rococo aesthetic provide an exemplary interface for entering the market of adulthood in the 1970s and in the millennial world?

The two characters in *Shimotsuma monogatari* meet through an eBay-like online market. Despite their polarized identities, they discover they both long to get out of the provinces, inhabited by real cows and a hapless bourgeoisie of superstore bargain hunters. In a nod to the most hallowed tropes of the "coming-of-age" novel, independence and social mobility, they move to the metropole and find their fortune by marketing artisanal items of rococo embroidery to an upscale boutique, where Momoko falls in love with the storeowner, and Ichigo becomes a star model. The tropes of "self-discovery" and adult subjectivity found through love are typical of shōjo manga and the young adult genre known as light novels, including Takemoto's *Shimotsuma monogatari.* What is less typical is that every sort of relationship in the novel and film—except the bonds of the biker gang and Momoko's care for her elderly grandmother—is entirely enabled and resolved through the market, from the cementing of the girls' friendship to the discovery of true love through the handmade bonnet.



**FIGURE 1.** A scene from the introductory reverie of *Shimotsuma monogatari* (2004, *Kamikaze Girls*), with Nakashima Tetsuya, Kyoko Fukada, Anna Tsuchiya, and Nobara Takemoto.

*Shimotsuma monogatari*'s move from country to city, connected to the coming-of-age narrative in the context of feminine solidarity cemented through the market, is staggeringly different than the rococo we see in the first subculture to popularize Frenchness in association with independence and autonomy, the manga *Rose of Versailles* (*Berusaiyu no bara*).[3] The rococo first appeared in this wildly popular manga, serialized in eighty-two chapters between 1972 and 1973 in the weekly girls' magazine *Margaret*. The "rose" is a metaphor referring to the strangeness of fourteen-year-old Marie Antoinette when she is sent from the Hapsburg court in 1769 to marry the young dauphin, the future Louis XIV, and prevent war from breaking out between France and Austria. The manga series tracks Marie's rise and fall at court against the backdrop of the French Revolution. Ikeda adds a second, fictional character, Oscar, to dramatize an emergent politics of solidarity that catalyzes as the Revolution looms. As a narrative, *Rose of Versailles* dramatizes the ideology of postwar social realism in the nationalist version advocated by the JCP (Japanese Communist Party). That is to say, despite, or alongside, *Rose of Versailles*'s dynamic and exuberant formal articulation and its pioneering "bubble" language of character consciousness, the manga is structured by a historicist narrative: the demise of the court and the emergence of the "people." In the manga, the very term of "self" cannot be thought outside of the issues that Ikeda dwells on: class consciousness, asymmetrical class relations between women, companionate marriage born of natural rights and naturally sexed bodies, a citizen's duty, and a subjectivity grounded in the material conditions of labor.

Ikeda adds a new character, Oscar de Jarjeyes, to introduce the question of how to represent female entrance into the new bourgeois world in a postwar Japanese climate in which it is hard to muster support for an aristocracy. This second focus, moreover, adds an awakening critical consciousness. Oscar's narrative of transformation is set in relief against Marie Antoinette's intransigent commitment to frivolity. Oscar is born to a father whose family has served as military guards to the Bourbons for many generations. Her father is so nonplussed to have another daughter that he has her crossdress as a boy and trains her as an aspiring servant of the court. The manga juxtaposes the life of Marie with that of Oscar, whose guard duties throw her into the streets of Paris and increasingly close to the tumult and suffering of its residents, far from court luxury. After a trial at court, Oscar throws away her title to join the "people." Her newfound solidarity is sparked by a new love for a commoner she grew up with, after the man she loves devotes himself to Marie Antoinette with a romantic intensity she admires but a

commitment to the court that she cannot imitate. The emphasis on companionate love, moreover, relativizes the narrative of maternal suffering that is often used to humanize Marie and bring the aristocratic family into a republican national family mold. Oscar's narrative of solidarity is a fundamentally different mode.

*Rose of Versailles* was the first of Ikeda's manga series to depict world-historical revolutions and protagonists; subsequent manga covered the Bolshevik Revolution (1975–81, *Orufeusu no mado*) and Napoleon's empire building (1986–95, *Eikō no Naporeon*). *Rose of Versailles*'s chief distinction from the rococo world of *Shimotsuma monogatari* is that the politics of taste and cultures of exchange play some role in its story, too, but the *manga* is fundamentally interested in narrating the populist nature of the French Revolution through the experience of both noble and commoner girls. It is tempting to praise the historicist baroque of Ikeda at the expense of the conspicuously less heroic *Shimotsuma monogatari.* But first, let us establish the formal logic that allows us to compare the transformations of baroque and rococo across decades, centuries, and media.

## BAROQUE TECTONICS

Ikeda's work stands out in the historical conditions of the 1970s because it connects a historicism that emphasizes the foundational nature of forms drawn from the baroque with the exuberance characteristic of the rococo. Her work, and shōjo manga in general, ran against the grain of the understanding of a fatigued, "posthistorical" Left that weighed heavily in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This melancholy, for instance, is signaled in the baleful title of a 2005 documentary film directed by Izuchi Kishū that interviews former leaders and thinkers of the 1960s student movement: *Left Alone.*[4] Suga Hidemi, in his overview of New Left political movements after 1956, refers, moreover, to the cluster of intellectuals such as Haniya Yutaka, who announced "the melancholy of the permanent revolutionary."[5] Like many writers, especially leftists of that time, Ikeda was interested in revolution and postrevolutionary climates. But unlike many writers, Ikeda was a member of the JCP.[6] This was an affiliation rare enough for a woman in the post-1956 era but still more rare to see in wildly successful mass culture auteurs of the high-growth economy. Although it is hard to document Ikeda's membership in the JCP, it is clear that she is far less interested in etiologies of failure than most male intellectuals and writers of the time.

THE EMPHASIS ON THE SPECTACULAR, A DELIGHT IN SENSORY EXPERIENCES, AND THE SERIAL NARRATIVE OF A STORY "WORLD" ARE ALL FORMAL ELEMENTS THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT IN THE STORY-ORIENTED JAPANESE SUBCULTURE OF THE LAST THIRTY YEARS.

While it is difficult to account for why Ikeda did not voice the same despair as male intellectuals after 1970, I would like to look at her interface of the rococo and seriality of the baroque system in a different set of formal terms: the logic allowed by an appeal to "Frenchness" as a site of universal popular rights. New media scholar Angela Ndalianis has adapted a framework of art-historical writing to understand some key properties of contemporary cinema of the last thirty years. Her rather formalistic approach to defining a neo-baroque aesthetic is helpful here for two reasons: it applies equally to other sections of the "culture industry" besides film, and it provides a point of entry for analyzing the baroque and rococo aesthetics that are so evident in these texts but house notoriously tangled webs of genres, artifacts, tastes, and approaches.

Both *Rose of Versailles* and *Shimotsuma monogatari* draw on key events and characters of the era just prior to the French Revolution. The court, with its hermetic world of artifice and ritual, offers tropes for examining how a feminine subject becomes self-sufficient and free. It does so through an interface of rococo aesthetics that becomes serialized in the mode of what new-media scholars call the neo-baroque. The baroque aesthetic is generally associated with the seventeenth century and by 1755 was understood as "decorative" and "playfully free," before it succumbed to the later characterization of "unusual, vulgar, exuberant, and beyond the norm."[7] Heinrich Wölfflin revived the term in two works, his 1888 *Renaissance und Barock* (Renaissance and Baroque) and his 1915 *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe (Founding principles of art history)*. The 1888 work focused chiefly on the development of architecture in Rome but was the first to apply the term "baroque" in both a broad and a narrow sense, referring to the literature of seventeenth-century Europe. The 1915 work further spelled out precise distinctions from Renaissance style.[8]

Though the baroque remained fluid in definition of formal features, period and scope, what remains a constant in Wölfflin and elsewhere is that the baroque is described in opposition to, yet emerging from, other styles: *not* classical, *not* Renaissance, *not* closed, *not* static. For better or worse, it is seen to present newness, openness, and rupture. The metonymizing of history in these terms brings the baroque to close to the formal logic of contemporary cultural production. In Ndalianis's formulation, formal elements characteristic of the baroque include seriality, multiple centers that disregard

framing and centralizing perspective, virtuosity, and the work's dynamism. Ndalianis writes that baroque "implied an art or music of extravagance, impetuousness, or virtuosity, all of which were concerned with stirring the affections and senses of the individual."[9] She points out that the extremely popular nature of the baroque owes to its appeal to mass spectacle in church architecture and art of the Counterreformation. Spectators are engaged as active, consuming subjects whose participation in the space is required. Participation in a neo-baroque world may not ultimately be underwritten by a transcendental, as a church is, but the intertextual nature of this baroque adapts neatly to the neoliberal formulation of millennial culture and its tendencies to "outsource" meaning making to the spectator. Neo-baroque works' open yet demanding relation to an audience solicits an active engagement. When an audience's "affections and senses" as actively consuming subjects are stirred, their consumption demands that they themselves produce the conventions and formal properties of the works and the intertextual connections that form a world.

By looking at the *locus classicus* of baroque style, the palace and gardens of Versailles, we can see key formal elements of the baroque that are taken and transformed in later subcultural works. A photo of the "bassin d'Apollo" (Figure 2) conveys four chief qualities of the baroque that Ndalianis sees operating similarly in neo-baroque works. In these qualities, we might note a tectonic tendency that is not present in the forms of either *Rose of Versailles* or *Shimotsuma monogatari*. First is the structure of a mythic "world." The temporally unvarying, modular nature of each part of the world is illustrated here in the statue of Apollo rising to carry the sun into its heaven. The status symbolizes, and metonymizes, how Louis XIV would call the world into being and enable it for each and all of his days by writing himself into a larger classic mythic scheme. Second is the lacing of this particular episode of the world into a larger story network spatially dispersed throughout the gardens as the path of the sun. The serial, expandable nature of each of these episodes is the baroque element that Ndalianis puts most weight on in the concept of the neo-baroque: highly structured, yet open ended. Third is the way that sensation and movement saturate the work in the dynamic figure of Apollo and his horses, and in the sensation of transition from one state (water) to another (air). Fourth is the active engagement of a visitor who is stirred by the movement and sensory elements, compelled to assemble the dispersed, serial elements of the garden "world" into a larger intertextual network.

The emphasis on the spectacular, a delight in sensory experiences, and the serial narrative of a story "world" are all formal elements that are



**FIGURE 2.** View of "Le Bassin d'Apollon et le Tapis Vert" (The Basin of Apollo and the Green Carpet), Versailles. Photograph courtesy of Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

significant in the story-oriented Japanese subculture of the last thirty years. What is different is the "world" in which a spectator/reader participates. Before going farther, I would like to summarize briefly why subculture could be brought into the fold of the neo-Baroque because of the very concrete "world" in which the concept emerged: United States–Japan relations after the 1947 Constitution and the 1970 reratification of the United States–Japan Security Treaty. I would like to highlight one ideological and historical reason for the setting of this story: the historicist foundation that licenses the aesthetic and formal language of the mingled baroque and rococo as Ikeda puts it forth. As it transitioned from baroque to revolutionary worlds, France was the historical origin of one discussion of rights that provides an alternative to, and supersedes, the version of "rights" at play in the American-imposed Constitution of postwar Japan. When rights are considered to be universal, and not imposed by a foreign occupier, the new incorporation of women into full citizenship cannot be bracketed as an imposed import: it is instead framed as an actively consumed potential that requires tailoring and customization by its receivers. Ikeda's choice of France as a setting for populist love and revolution provided a way to sidestep the chief source of fatigue, the failure of the Japanese critique of dependency on the United States when the United States–Japan Security Treaty was reratified in 1970. In particular, the plot

of *Rose of Versailles* dramatized how "rights" were an invention of a popular, anti-imperial, spontaneous uprising, not the imposition of a foreign occupying power, as in the case of women's voting and other rights in Japan under the American Occupation. In the next section, I hope to show that as the trope of "rights" emerges from the baroque, it allows a kind of historicism to be articulated that challenges received notions about the new entrants into this world: girls as they are represented in comics.

## BAROQUE CITIZENSHIP: SUBCULTURE, GIRLS, AND INTERIORITY

In contrast to Anglo-American accounts, in many Japanese critics' minds, subculture is specifically tied to the 1945–52 Occupation and its legacies. In Anglo-American critical circles, the rubric of subculture comes primarily from two directions. The first approach from which Japan subculture is distinct comes from the Chicago school of ethnographic sociology of the 1920s. Its key concept, one that persists in cultural studies today, is that of deviance. The key questions revolved around understanding why people do not assimilate to a normalizing force such as Americanization.[10] The understanding of subculture as an oppositional or deviant identity was reprised in studies of Thatcherite Britain that worked to understand why dropping out of a labor market or other class-based crucibles of ideology occurred or, alternatively, how style could be conceived as opposition to cultural and class hegemony, using semiotics to borrow and rework objects and things into a "new ensemble" in the larger "struggle for possession of the sign," celebrating the individual status of revolt.[11] Writers like Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, and Rachel Powell were provoked by Howard Becker's breakaway sociological study *Outsiders* and collaborated to formulate ideas like resistance through ritual and style in dress and music that saw politics as a place where signs and their readings registered both pleasures and conflicts.

Subculture is most often conceived differently in Japan, in the context of a reflexive relation to cultural nationalism in the postwar geopolitical scheme of the Occupation. The main difference is that, while Anglo-American thought sees subculture as defined by a nonnormative or marginal position and likely approaches study through sociology and urban ethnography, subculture in Japan is defined as a community formed around the conventions of representations in one medium of information culture (manga, anime, heavy metal fans, and so on).

The idea of subculture was debated in the 1970s through literature, not new media, when the writer Murakami Ryū won the prestigious Akutagawa prize for his novel *Almost Transparent Blue* (*Kagirinaku tōmei ni chikai burū*) in 1977. The novel was widely perceived as vulgar and derivative, even by the committee that awarded the prize. Furthermore, the setting of underground youth culture on the outskirts of a U.S. Army base provoked the influential critic Etō Jun to blast Murakami's novel for its decadence and for the base's presence in the work, which he felt should exclude the work from the field of "pure literature."[12] In 1976, Etō had criticized the "nonsense" quality of *Almost Transparent Blue* because it registered "no literary impression." Etō attributed the lack of "literariness" and dependence on the ready-made elements of youth culture clichés to a fatal dependence on American culture, an attitude that 'reflects' that dependence by representing only "a partial cultural phenomenon, not a society's total culture."[13] Etō retired from book reviewing in 1978 in disgust at the lack of "literariness" in writing that "reflected" subculture while itself having no "expression."[14]

Although subculture would come to signify a more-or-less objective reference to partial cultures, New Left and New Academic writers continued to deride subculture as partial and as unworthy of intellectual engagement. A signature writer of New Academic, Asada Akira, criticized Ōtsuka's treatment of the Aum subway gassing incidents as unworthy, saying that they were a "stunted" phenomenon that should not be taken seriously as "either religion/spirituality or thought."[15] Asada is convinced of the trivial and aberrant nature of subculture and marks a decisive difference between academic- and industry-oriented analyses of subculture.

Asada's dismissive view is opposed to that of writer and editor Ōtsuka Eiji, a manga editor and critic who has written most prolifically on subculture as forms of representation. Ōtsuka takes subculture seriously, not because of intellectual intentionality but because it presents the problems of a generation, sociological problems that should be "historicized." Since at least the time of the Asada/Ōtsuka dispute, "subculture" has come to refer to communities of fans and readers who are numerically minor, and has become attached to media apart from literature, such as comics, games, independent music, and other small-scale media belonging to both do-it-yourself and mass culture. Far from deviant, conventions of media-dependent subculture suggest a norm, an intelligible identity in the context of highly differentiated identities and the high-growth economy. Although the normalizing valence of Japanese subculture differs from the American focus on assimilationism and the British focus on deviance and resistance, two

primary models of subculture cite different reasons for the concept's importance in postwar Japan.

The first model is suggested by Ōtsuka, whose academic training was in ethnology and who places subculture in a framework of chronological history within Japanese cultural production. For Ōtsuka, Etō's critique and retirement from book reviewing present key moments of subculture. Ōtsuka objects to the way Etō dismisses subculture because it does not fit into history and is artificial. Like many critics, Ōtsuka associates subculture with partial media formations, rather than total social formations, and sees subculture in the birth of new media that were first popularly consumed in the 1970s context of information culture (*jōhō bunka*). He finds that subculture narratives are postmodern and that their "small-h historical" narratives follow on the "end of history" as multiple narratives converge to become ahistorical in the early 1990s, when the economic bubble collapsed and the Shōwa emperor died, thus rupturing the ideological continuity that had underwritten modernity, imperialism, and mass culture since the 1920s. This model is concerned overall with issues of national sovereignty in the postwar context of the Occupation and its legacies. It is closer to *Rose of Versailles* because it focuses on representation, citizenship, and popular sovereignty.

The second model derives from the late 1950s with the emergence of youth-culture groups such as the "*taiyōzoku*" (sun tribe) that named the romantically nihilistic gang of decadent youth who redefined beach culture in the 1957 novel and 1959 film *Taiyō no kisetsu* (Season of the sun). This is probably one model for Etō's charge that Murakami's 1977 novel was "derivative." As Ueno Toshiya explains, the term *zoku* is an anthropological term that typically designates a tribe. Mabuchi Kōsuke would give this a slightly broader meaning of socioeconomic class and would locate it in the immediate postwar-era aristocracy that had to pawn its belongings to stay afloat.[16] But both agree that by the late 1950s, *zoku* referred to a tightly-knit social formation that plays by its own brash or "creatively destructive rules."[17] Although the rhetoric of tribes may seem primitivist or anthropological, *zoku* is unrelated to temporal formations of development; it merely indicates affinity and differentiation. Where the first model sees the nation-state as the primary a priori of cultural production, the *zoku* model begins with a genre conscious of its global relation to other movements; it may be more appropriate to be talking about cultural production within a globalized context of differential identities. This model is closer to *Shimotsuma monogatari* because it is less concerned with the origins of historicist subjectivity and more interested in how objects facilitate social mobility and how forms of exchange and markets underwrite identity.

Like Etō, Ōtsuka is often troubled by a loss of history and historically inflected subjectivity that follows on this loss of the historical—by which he typically means historicist—consciousness. One particular area of concern is contemporary history's debt to the Occupation. A second, related area of concern, one that is most pertinent to shōjo manga and its highly formalistic relation to the baroque, is the loss of history he sees in shōjo manga, an aporia that he argues defangs the potentially radical nature of the 1947 Constitution. Ōtsuka considers Article 24 to be the most "radical" element of the Constitution because it mandates equal rights (and, presumably responsibilities) to men and women in selecting marriage partners and mandates that "laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes." Needless to say, companionate marriage is one of the tropes most beloved of shōjo manga. That he grants Article 24 priority over Article 9—the "peace article" that fueled the New Left and grassroots peace movements—is distinctive. He faults, however, the interpretation of Article 24 for placing too much emphasis on the modern "self."

To Ōtsuka, to "historicize" means to understand how engaged subjectivity and self-reflexivity are crucial components of Japanese cultural production, no matter how "high" or "low" the source. The crux of Ōtsuka's critique is that too many critics place too much emphasis on interiority and the "self" at the expense of history. Indeed, his main critique of shōjo manga has been applied to the baroque itself, particularly in its German context. The art historian Georg Dehio, for instance, equates it with the "basic German mood" of German art through the ages because the "Baroque strives for expression, even at the expense of form."[18] The five volumes of *Rose of Versailles* are resplendent with expressive suffering. Indeed, emotions are crucial to the critical reception of shōjo manga and are often seen to eclipse qualities of social life and history due to the interest in private life. Figure 3 shows the kind of scene that shōjo manga critics often emphasize. Here, layering and multiple narratives combine to amplify and deepen subjectivity, particularly in lyrical moments that express interior life, as we see Maria Theresa's anguish over dispatching her daughter to the Bourbon court.

Ōtsuka sees shōjo manga's tendency to dwell on this very kind of subjective depth as a failure to "historicize." This critique is typical of harsh postwar literary critiques of prewar fiction that derided fiction, particularly works that focused on the "self" for its lack of resistance to fascist mobilization.[19] What is new in the critique of "insufficient socialization" is Ōtsuka's shift to focus on the vivid and private interior lives of young female protagonists and to "historicize" representations of their inner worlds. He attributes this new




**FIGURE 3.** A pensive moment from the first volume of *Rose of Versailles* (1972). Marie Theresa vexes over her decision. "I wonder if I did the right thing . . . that innocent, tomboyish, playful Marie . . ." She alternates between hoping that Marie's arrival will cement peace, and a foreboding that Marie is destined to be unhappy. "She may rise to be queen . . . In the mind of that spoiled, sweet, everyday girl, surely this can bring nothing but unhappiness." Finally she gives up, crying, "Ah, I can't bear this unsettledness," and the scene closes uneasily: "For some reason, I feel an ill omen . . ." The candle in the side panel gives an additional durational moodiness to the sequence of panels that flip-flop between Marie Theresa's memories of Marie, and the external presentation of her thinking; its constancy exacerbates the contrasting nature of Marie's motion and her mother's stasis, Marie's beseeching open eyes and her mother's covered frown. Image courtesy of Ikeda Productions.

subject in manga to the "24-year group" (24-nen gumi), a cluster of female manga artists all born in Shōwa 24 (1949), which includes Ikeda. Ōtsuka's critique of shōjo manga abbreviates his broader critique that feminist writers have toed the same fatally ahistorical line as fiction writers in their failure to show how the "self" is modulated by social and historical conditions.

Is this a fair critique? Are shōjo manga really antihistorical? In my view, no. Part of Ōtsuka's critique may lie in the very successful nature of shōjo manga. If the baroque eighteenth-century aesthetic let people assemble elements of the myth of Louis XIV into a coherent and immersive mythic world, the question here is how the audience becomes capable of traversing multiple texts to give coherence to a specific work. Given that *Rose of Versailles* has been remediated not into critique of myth but into formats as wide in scope as coloring books, the Takarazuka Revue's *theatrical productions*, a wildly popular anime series, and a myriad of commemorative volumes, the apparently ahistorical nature of the commodity form could seem nettling to Ōtsuka. Indeed, it may be hard to see what could in fact be revolutionary about *Rose of Versailles* without knowledge of three crucial facts external to the characters and the world of the eighteenth-century Bourbon court. These contexts may let us to see things Ōtsuka does not, while maintaining his basic line of inquiry.

THE ENTRANCE OF WOMEN INTO A MARKET OF PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS APPEARS TO BE INTEGRAL TO THE BAROQUE NATURE OF NEO-BAROQUE SERIALITY, AS WELL AS TO THE ROCOCO AESTHETIC OF THE PLAYFUL DECORATION OF PRIVATE LIFE.

First, Ikeda's manga are different from other "24-year group" manga because they challenged the very parameters of privacy. No interiority is exempt from being evaluated in terms of its significance in the world-historical frame of revolution. And second, the timing of Ikeda's story of the royal family's demise is striking because, at its time of publication in 1972–73, it depends on a world-historical situation of the sort that leftist commentators typically say was exhausted. This period of leftist fatigue was, in fact, when female writers were entering the comic market as producers and consumers, as in the seismic shift of the *ancien régime*.

Sharon Kinsella reminds us that the manga markets of the 1970s provided an unexpected new gateway into the medium for women via new networks for the production and distribution of amateur manga such the massive Comiket convention. Yonezawa Yoshihiro, then president of Comiket, explains:

> All the independent comics and meeting places of the 1960s were disappearing by 1973 to 1974, and then *COM* magazine folded. It was a regression, from being able to publish all kinds of stuff in mainstream magazines to being able to publish only unusual stuff in *dōjinshi* underground magazines. But what else can you do, but start again from the underground?[20]

The new network of this "consumer revolution" subsequently benefited from technical changes in media industries, such as the greater availability of circulated goods on DVD and other platforms, as well as the capacity for multiple audiovisual modes in the same object. The entrance of women into a market of producers and consumers appears to be integral to the baroque nature of neo-baroque seriality, as well as to the rococo aesthetic of the playful decoration of private life.

Finally, Ikeda's manga was modeled on the literary style of Austrian writer Stefan Zweig's biography of Marie Antoinette. Zweig's profound interest in historiographies of chance make the text of *Rose of Versailles* discursive in ways most shōjo manga are not. While Ikeda did "create" the manga, it is worth noting that many of these humanizing characteristics, which give a less-than-melancholy interpretation of revolution, draw on Stefan Zweig's 1933 book to provide both structure and information and to anchor the interior life of the characters in their own saga. Figure 3, for example, depicts a situation taken directly from Zweig's narrative.

In Zweig's biography, Marie Antoinette's life is thoroughly unremarkable for its first thirty-eight years. His biography attempts neither to vilify her as the "*louve autrichienne*" reviled by revolutionary sans-culottes, nor to "deck her with a halo" to "flatter the dynasty" of prerevolutionary Bourbons.[21] He depicts her, rather, as an "average woman," who would neither have been known, nor known herself, had it not been for a chance encounter with an "unparalleled . . . display of historical tensions" spurred by the early days of the French Revolution.[22] Zweig's interest in Marie Antoinette is significant because it departs from many nineteenth- and twentieth-century attempts to see the queen as a "representative" woman because of her role as a mother, linking the historical narrative between court and middle-class family: rather, she is representative for her very mediocrity until her accidental encounter with fate.[23]

Let's look at one more example (Figure 4) from *Rose of Versailles* to see how this story is told in what Thierry Groensteen calls the "the relational play of a plurality of interdependent images," which is to say, the formal relations of a system of images on the page.[24] Figure 4 is the first page of the *Rose of*




**FIGURE 4.** Introductory scene-setting from chapter 1 of *Rose of Versailles* (1972). The two panels set the scene for the stories that unfold in the following volumes. The upper panel introduces the story's timeline, and sets up suspenseful expectation about the three characters, each born in a noble setting in the three countries of Sweden, France, and Austria. The lower panel sings the praises of Felsen, who is later dispatched to the court at Versailles and will commence a passionate romance with Marie Antoinette. He cuts quite a figure at court, with his good looks and masculine bearing, setting the heart of all the court ladies racing. The following pages relate the backstories of the other two main characters, Oscar François de Jarjeyes, born near Versailles, and Marie Antoinette Joseph Jeanne de Lorraine Autriche, born at the Hapsburg court. Image courtesy of Ikeda Productions.

*Versailles* series. The juxtaposition of fates that aligns Marie Antoinette, Oscar, and a Swedish nobleman is narrated in a strong discursive voice that is much more directive and present as a commentary than it is in the vast majority of shōjo manga. The "voiceover" draws heavily on sequencing, phrasing, and the use of present tense typical of Zweig's historiographical writings. The effect is to create a sense of suspenseful unfolding. It tells us that the story takes place "In 1755 . . . " and that emerging from this point in time are three stories: "In this year, in three separate European countries, were born three people who would have a fateful meeting at Versailles." The dashing count and future paramour of Marie Antoinette, Count Hans Axel von Fersen, is first introduced, a narrative order that accommodates the usual reading direction of top to bottom, right to left. "In the northern land of Sweden, Hans Axel von Fersen is born to a distinguished line, eldest son of a councilor." After establishing the setting and illustrating his fortune, the narration proceeds to comment on Fersen's physical beauty in a text box pinned over his chest.

Here, it is worth noting that Fersen, whose visage graces the opening page, was, until the late nineteenth century, only a bit player in historiography of the revolution. One of Zweig's innovations as a biographer was to introduce new historical evidence about the queen's lover and friend:

> [D]uring the latter half of the nineteenth century a romantic tale began to gain currency. In a Swedish castle there had been preserved under seal numerous packets of Marie Antoinette's private letters. At first little credence was given to this improbable report. Then there appeared a printed edition of the private correspondence, and, although the letters had been barbarously pruned of intimate details, the book was enough, at one stroke, to thrust the previously unknown Scandinavian noble into the most distinguished place among the friends of Marie Antoinette. These letters modify our whole outlook upon the character of a woman hitherto regarded as light-minded. They show a spiritual drama splendid and perilous, an idyll partly in the shadow of the king's court and partly in that cast by the menacing guillotine, one of those soul-stirring romances which perhaps can only be penned by history herself.[25]

Zweig's portrait of himself as a mere scribe of "history herself" should make us rethink Ōtsuka's charge of shōjo manga's failure to "historicize." As we turn to the millennial example of baroque and rococo, *Shimotsuma monogatari,* it is useful to remember one further historicist narrative that makes

the eighteenth-century story correspond to the interests of the twentieth/twenty-first-century one: namely, that Marie Antoinette as queen of mediocrity is a savvy model for a producer or consumer of shōjo manga. Historically, she is an epoch-shifting queen due to her status as an exemplary participant in the market, just as the shōjo of Taishō modernism was in the forefront of the interwar consumer revolution. The "chance" nature of Marie Antoinette's historical mediocrity is hastened because she was the first queen to leave the palace and patronize the highly regulated and exclusively masculine *marchande de mode* system.[26] If we think of her significance as linked to the patron's entrance into the market, subject to those laws of chance, the connections to postwar Japan and to the millennial baroque become clearer. *Rose of Versailles* dramatizes the Revolution as a shift from feudal to populist sovereignty, whereas *Shimotsuma monogatari* uses the rococo to correspond to a shift from feudal to capitalist relations in eighteenth-century French historicist narrative. In the case of *Rose of Versailles,* self-expression means universalizing the tectonic structures of marriage put in place by Article 24, whereas in *Shimotsuma monogatari,* the miniature, decorative mode of the rococo attaches its characters to an unexpectedly far-reaching network as both producers and consumers.

## THE NEO-BAROQUE AND MILLENNIAL FRENCHNESS

While in real historical time the rococo aesthetic fell out of favor near the end of the *ancien régime,* it has undergone something of a revival in postwar Japanese subculture. After the millennium, *Shimotsuma monogatari* idealizes the world of the rococo era by drawing on specific aesthetic elements that were lively, ornamental, and unheroic in contrast to the looming and systematic nature of Louis XIV's baroque world of allegory. Momoko's gothic Lolita street fashion inverts and sometimes reprises elements of the eighteenth-century rococo aesthetic of the Petit Trianon.

*Shimotsuma monogatari* begins with a dense art-historical explication of Momoko's favored style, culminating in Diderot's condemnation of the rococo. The biker girl, Ichigo, first appears wearing "black extra-extra long knickerbockers with a bizarre aloha shirt she had purchased from me, which had Versace symbols scattered all over it, and over that, her kamikaze coat."[27] The novel's narrator explains the aesthetic principles that underpin the seemingly odd alliance between the two girls: they share a fondness for "extravagant addition." Momoko explains:

> Whenever I really want to get into the rococo spirit and give everything I have to being a Lolita, I force myself into a tight corset and make my waist smaller. So might a Yankii's *sarashi* and a Lolita's corset serve the same purpose? Ugh, what an awful thought. But if you look at Yankii bikes and clothes, you can see their aesthetic is all about extravagant addition, which is actually the same as the Lolita aesthetic >sigh< What am I saying?[28]

But this extravagance seems to differ from the consumerism that typically dominates discussions of Japan in and after the high-growth economy. Another axiom of the rococo court that Momoko reprises holds that "for one who lives with the rococo spirit, productive activity such as labor is to be avoided at all costs."[29] Yet the happy ending in which the story culminates is all about being able to turn the frivolous, aristocratic hobby of embroidery into a vocation, to transform hobby into work. In the manifesto-like first sequences of the film, ladies in the digitized pastoral scene (Figure 1) Momoko narrates spend the day strolling through undulating landscapes from one exquisite interior space to the next. They fuss over needlepoint, wince while their corsets are laced, and vanish into the bedroom with abandon.

But the happy ending of *Shimotsuma monogatari* depends more on labor than its absence. It is about finding a place in the world through production. Momoko discovers that mice have eaten holes in one of her bonnets, a "flaw" she covers up with embroidered stitches. But where the cult of the pastoral had meant absence of labor in the court of Versailles, the longing for class mobility sends Momoko straight to work as she buys and sells online merchandise, designs new kinds of garments with her craft skills, and binds herself to supposedly antithetical subcultures. On her next visit to a high-end gothic Lolita boutique, the fascinated clerk introduces her to the store's owner/designer, a foppish figure who makes Momoko swoon, and then asks her to work on commission making frocks and bonnets for the shop.[30] Her independence ends up being both self-sufficient and commodifiable.

As we saw, the bourgeois revolution of *Rose of Versailles* makes its character into a hero and a passionate citizen through the interfaces of love, labor, class-consciousness, and companionate marriage. *Shimotsuma monogatari* makes her into an equally ardent worker, but the terms of subculture through which she becomes an active subject have changed. Where *Rose of Versailles* transcended the bilateral scheme of U.S.–Japan relations by asserting a universal claim on rights, popular sovereignty in *Shimotsuma monogatari* is linked to a transnational awareness of how elements of a market differ from each other. The rococo interface traverses the networks of baroque spectacle

and seriality, while feminizing the crossover of media forms to make work compatible with play. If play was a space of liberation for thinkers of the twentieth century, millennial girls confront us with the sober reality of shōjo manga and the neoliberal state writ large. *Shimotsuma monogatari* updates the three little words that inspired *Rose of Versailles,* the romantic whisper of "I love you," to connect subculture to subjective agency through a more sobering three-word imperative: do it yourself.

## Notes

1. *Shimotsuma monogatari,* dir. Nakashima Tetsuya (2004); translated as *Kamikaze Girls,* DVD (VIZ Media, 2006).

2. Novala Takemoto, *Kamikaze Girls,* trans. Akemi Wegmüller (San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2002), 7.

3. Ikeda Riyoko, *Berusaiyu no bara* (Rose of Versailles) (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2002–3). A relation to Frenchness is not unheard of in contemporary pop culture, though the shōjo baroque differs markedly from the Enlightenment schemes of knowledge found in cultures of collecting in millennial Japan. The Pokémon series, for instance, has a backstory about its interactive play world that recalls the Enlightenment project of the Encyclopedists. It has a founding scholar, the eighteenth-century French Count Tajirin, who was the first to study, order, and classify the thirty types of Pokémon that he found. Japanese scholars have advanced the science of Pokémonology by discovering, classifying, and tracking the evolution of new forms of Pokémon life. See Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

4. See Izuchi Kishū, *Left Alone: Jizoku suru nyūlefuto no "68-nen kakumei"* (Left Alone: The continuing new left's "1968 revolution") (Tokyo: Akashi shoten, 2005), and Suga Hidemi, *Kakumeitekina, amari ni kakumeitekina: "1968-nen no kakumei"* shiron (Revolutionary, all too revolutionary: On the "1968 revolution") (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2004).

5. Ibid., 31.

6. Chika Kinoshita reminded me of this point, and of Ikeda's political affiliation.

7. René Wellek, "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 5 no. 2, (1946): 77.

8. Heinrich Wöfflin, *Renaissance und Barock: Eine Untersuchung überr Wesen und Entstehung des Barockstils in Italien* (Renaissance and Baroque: An examination of the nature and genesis of the baroque style in Italy) (Munich: T. Ackermann, 1888), and *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der Neueren Kunst* (Principles of art history: The problem of stylistic development in later art). (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1915).

9. Angela Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment.* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 7.

10. Ken Gelder, *The Subcultures Reader,* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), 19.

11. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 17.

Many of the CCSC works, in particular, had a focus on gender that was, in fact, very compatible with how subculture emerged in Japan. See Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From "Jackie" to "Just Seventeen"* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991), and Paul E. Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Farnborough, U.K.: Saxon House, 1977).

12. Etō Jun: *Tozasareta gengo kūkan: senryō-gun no ken'etsu to sengo nihon* (Closed linguistic space: Occupation censorship and postwar Japan) (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 1989).

13. Ōtsuka Eiji, *Sabukaruchaa bungakuron (On literature and/as subculture)* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2004), 12.

14. Etō, an extremely sophisticated, learned, textually sensitive and nationalist literary critic and public intellectual, published a 1989 a book on censorship following a stay at Princeton and a second stint in the United States in 1979–80.

15. Ōtsuka Eiji. *Kanojotachi no rengō sekigun: sabukaruchaa to sengo minshūshugi* (Their Red Army: Subculture and postwar democracy) (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 1996), 236.

16. Mabuchi Kōsuke, *"Zoku"tachi no sengoshi*. Toshi no jānarizumu (A postwar history of "zoku" subculture. Series Journalism of the city) (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1989), 13.

17. Ueno Toshiya, "Unlearning to Rave: Techno-Party as the Contact Zone in Trans-Local Formations," in *The Post-Subcultures Reader,* eds. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 104.

18. Quoted in Wolfgang Stechow, "Definitions of the Baroque in the Visual Arts," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 5, no. 2 (1946): 110.

19. Suzuki Sadami, *The Concept of "Literature" in Japan,* trans. Royall Tyler (Kyoto, Japan: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2006).

20. Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 106.

21. Stefan Zweig, *Marie Antoinette, the Portrait of an Average Woman,* trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Viking Press, 1933), xi.

22. Ibid., xiv.

23. See Katherine Binhammer, "Marie Antoinette Was 'One of Us': British Accounts of the Martyred Wicked Queen," *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 44, no. 2–3 (2003): 233–55; and Regina Schulte, "The Queen—a Middle-Class Tragedy: The Writing of History and Creation of Myths in Nineteenth-Century France and Germany," *Gender and History* 14, no. 2 (2002): 266–93.

24. Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics,* trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 17.

25. Zweig, *Marie Antoinette,* 226.

26. See Caroline Weber, *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution,* 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 2006); and Daniel Roche, *La culture des apparences: une histoire du vêtement (xviie–xviiie siècles)* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); translated into English as *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the "Ancien Régime"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

27. Takemoto, *Kamikaze Girls*, 176.

28. Ibid., 138.

29. Ibid., 43.

30. Ibid., 168.

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GERALD FIGAL

# Monstrous Media and Delusional Consumption in Kon Satoshi's *Paranoia Agent*

## THE OTAKU MANQUÉ

Kon Satoshi's 2004 thirteen-episode TV anime series *Mōsō dairinin*[1] (translated as *Paranoia Agent*, although *mōsō* is more akin to "delusion") presents a twist on the usual Tokyo-destroying monster. The monster that lays waste to the city springs not from an atomic mutation or alien planet or from a supernatural realm or robots run amok but apparently from the stressed-out psyches of the people themselves: when feeling cornered and under pressure, a mysterious inline-skating, bat-wielding boy (dubbed "Shōnen Batto," literally "Bat Boy" but translated in the English version as "L'il Slugger") appears and whacks them, sometimes fatally, thus releasing them from their anxieties. As the series progresses, Shōnen Batto transforms into an increasingly monstrous shape, first through rumors and media hype and then in "reality" by feeding on people's anxieties and desires for escape. By the climax of the story, he is an amorphous black ooze flooding violently through the urban landscape, absorbing everyone. While the origin of Shōnen Batto is revealed to have been a young girl's inability to take responsibility for her actions out of embarrassment and fear of punishment, the social conditions under

which her present actions trigger Shōnen Batto's assaults and metamorphosis point to the monster as something beyond a mere mass-psychological projection of stress made manifest. Media itself attains monstrous proportions, feeding and fed by a hollow hyperconsumerism, a consumerism for the sake of consuming.

I'd like to read *Paranoia Agent* as working through the unexpected and monstrous transformations that mass-mediated consumer capitalism effects on social relations and individual agency, turning consumers into what we might call *otaku manqué*—obsessive "fans" of media products without the attendant specialized knowledge of them or active engagement in them. In this context, the "fans" are all those who passively participate in and sustain this consumption, not the archetypal otaku, although the figure of the otaku occupies a key position in the critique I think Kon is offering as overseer of the series (the thirteen episodes have several different directors). Here the classic otaku figure becomes the active, overt, and concentrated instance of the passive "soft fandom" that progressively congeals, hardens, and materializes among the Tokyoites depicted in the series. In their hypermediated daily lives and in their mania over a media consumable, they become unwitting and incomplete otaku without even knowing it. Not that being a complete otaku fares much better. This vision of a kind of otakuization of society through media and consumption differs from the usual emphasis on the obsessive otaku inhabiting semiautonomous "islands in space" carved out by self-consciously attained media-based knowledge of specialized subjects.[2] Rather, these consumer-fans, by dint of their unreflective and generalized but no less obsessive—in a word, delusional—relationship to media and media consumables, drown in an undifferentiated mass (culture).

For this analysis, Marshall McLuhan's famous but often misunderstood dictum "the medium is the message" provides a useful springboard. For McLuhan, a "medium" is "any extension of ourselves" (a tool, a technology, a system of signs). A "message" comprises the often-unnoticed structural changes (of "scale" or "pace" or "pattern") that a new innovation brings into society.[3] In *Paranoia Agent,* the medium is the monster, where the medium comprises the electronic media technologies that have become part and parcel of mass—I would say mass-delusional—consumption. The monster—the structural transformation or, in this instance, structural deformation—lies in the figure of comfort-providing character goods: the soft plush toy, the childish accessory, the cute "superdeformed" anime figure. The overtly monstrous figure of Shōnen Batto is wedded to the covertly monstrous figure of Maromi, the "sleepy-eyed dog" character at the psychic heart of the series.

Both absorb virtually all the public's attention to become potential objects of otaku knowledge and desire that remain unfulfilled. This relationship between the threatening Shōnen Batto and the *kawaii* Maromi comes across in one promotional still for the series where the former appears as a shadow on the latter. The real threat is thus not the personal anxiety that conjures up Shōnen Batto but rather what might be called the social narcolepsy and narcissism that media-driven mass consumerism produces in contemporary Japan, according to the critique Kon seems to be staging (ironically) in this anime. In this respect, Kon's commentary bears relation to Murakami Takashi's Superflat project, which he styles as a "Monster Manifesto" (*kaibutsu sengen*) for the "deformed monsters" that are postwar Japanese and their popular art. Murakami, however, embraces this "art, the work of monsters," and its iconic figure, the otaku, while Kon displays their self-destructive logic.[4] If otaku are viewed (positively or negatively) as social monsters living on islands of self-absorption apart from society, consumers as otaku manqué are social monsters living on islands of self-absorption within society, which comes across in *Paranoia Agent* as a much more dangerous threat.

## TAKE A REST

For the heart of Kon's critique, we must dive first into episode 10, "Maromi Madoromi" (officially translated as "Mellow Maromi" where "madoromi" suggests "dozing off"). The most self-reflexive of the series, this episode concerns the production of an anime series, called *Maromi Madoromi* and based on the hit character Maromi, created by character designer Sagi Tsukiko. We later learn that as a twelve-year-old Sagi accidentally let her puppy, also named Maromi, get hit by a car when she doubled over—apparently from her first menstrual cramps—and lost hold of the puppy's leash.[5] She is the first victim of Shōnen Batto, whom we also later learn she fabricated at the time of the puppy incident to cast herself as victim, thus excusing herself from the real explanation for the accident. (Following the series' motif of naming characters in relation to various animals, her name "Sagi" is a homonym for a type of heron but also for the word for "fraud" or "deception.") By the end of the "Mellow Maromi" episode the entire production crew, under stress to make a deadline exacerbated by a bungling production manager, one-by-one falls fatal victim to Shōnen Batto. The commentary on the notoriously difficult work conditions of TV anime is clear, but my attention is drawn to the identification of Maromi as monster, which begins explicitly from this episode

and subsequently leads to a string of connections and revelations that propel the story through its climax and denouement during the final three episodes. That this occurs in an anime in production within an anime throws into relief the issue of the anime medium itself and its complicity in the production and dissemination of the soporific effect of character goods like Maromi and the delusional (*mōsō*) consumerism for which it is a representative, an agent (*dairinin*).

Episode 10 opens with what immediately strikes the viewer as a low-budget TV anime done in a simple, flat, cute style coded as "kids' cartoon" that is very different from the more sophisticated look of the rest of the series. The camera pans down from a blue-yellow sky through the horizon of a suburban neighborhood, cutting to a pair of small feet in baseball cleats and socks stepping along with a noonday shadow conspicuously cast as a fluctuating black ellipsis below. We then look down, as if from the roof of a three- or four-story building, at a little leaguer in his ball uniform, walking spiritlessly through town with a bat on his shoulder. A cut a few seconds later of the boy's upper torso is timed with his heavy sigh, at which point the camera shifts on cue to eye level for a medium shot of the boy passing a toy store that has a bin full of stuffed animals for sale on the sidewalk. In one window, a robot and Godzilla-like monster hover over his head (Figure 1). Just as he exits the frame, a Maromi doll comes alive from the bin of stuffed animals to follow the boy to a riverbank, where, in frustration, the boy has flashbacks of striking out in a game and berates himself, exclaiming "I'm a nothing" (*dōse boku nan ka . . .*). Just as he is about to heave his bat into the river, Maromi pokes him from behind, startling the boy, who drops the bat that then rolls into the river. This action sends the scene for a few seconds into the sketches on which the completed scene was based. This sudden shift to an even more primitive state of the animation works well to convey the boy's surprise—it is as if the color is knocked out of him as the background is pulled away, isolating the emotion on the isolated characters. But it also works to underscore the self-reflexive nature of this episode.

This play between the completed animation and the sketches continues during Maromi's attempts to cheer up the boy by assuring him that he isn't worthless; instead, he is only "tired" and should simply "take a rest." As Maromi repeats several times the hypnotic mantra *"yasuminayō"* ("take a rest"), the details of the sketches degrade further and then the camera zooms out to reveal that we have been watching the production of the cartoon on a monitor in an anime studio (Figure 2).

Besides this self-referential framing, the first thing of note about this




**FIGURE 1.** Anime within anime: scene from episode 1 of the TV series *Maromi Madoromi* in episode 10—"Maromi Madoromi" ("Mellow Maromi")—of the TV series *Paranoia Agent*.

sequence is the soundtrack. The music is the end theme of the series itself, "White Hill: Maromi's Theme," which normally plays through the credits of each episode while the camera pans around images of the main characters in a death-like sleep in a circle around a huge plush toy—Maromi—that appears as the camera zooms out. Played during the opening of episode 10, it invokes the drowsiness that Maromi induces and presides over. Indeed, the scene ends with Maromi easing the boy's frustrations and disappointment not by suggesting he practice harder but rather by coaxing him to take a rest, to escape waking reality through sleep. Maromi's function here, as it is throughout the series, is that of a narcotic that relieves stress by encouraging the avoidance of the hard work of adult reality and by providing excuses to evade responsibility. In this episode, the blundering staff production manager Saruta ("Monkey")—nothing but a bundle of excuses—is frequently framed by images of Maromi in the form of promotional posters and various character goods. At one point, echoing the opening sequence's shift to sketches, he begins to dissolve into an anime sketch of himself as he verbally denies responsibility for foul-ups that have plagued the production of *Mellow Maromi*. In other words, his escape from responsibility is paralleled by a fall from his "real" anime world into a second-degree, cartoon-sketch world. In both instances, the anime within the anime is associated with escape from




**FIGURE 2.** Framing the site of production of the anime within the anime. From *Paranoia Agent*, episode 10, "Maromi Madoromi."

the burdens of reality facilitated by the "sleepy-eyed" Maromi, itself a narcotic in all its manifestations: plush toy, hallucination, anime. The analogy to our (real human) relationship to the consumption of "first-order" anime is apparent.

The second thing of note in the opening sequence is the suggestion that Maromi and Shōnen Batto are connected. It is no coincidence that the little leaguer, a kind of superdeformed anime version of Shōnen Batto himself, calls Maromi a *bakemono* (monster). The same language is applied to Shōnen Batto in the following episodes, wherein the identification of Maromi with Shōnen Batto is made explicit. One might also read the "M" on the boy's ball cap as signifying Maromi, covering—and controlling—the head of the boy.

The rest of this episode is about the making of this inaugural episode of *Mellow Maromi,* interspersed with several nondiagetic insets hosted by a mini-Maromi who teaches us about the various staff roles as staff members are successively knocked off by Shōnen Batto. Unlike earlier attacks, however, the crewmembers are never shown actually being assaulted by Shōnen Batto. Each is simply shown with his or her head in pool of blood. What we do see is the ubiquitous image of Maromi ("The Healer Dog" as the promotional posters say) dominating the office space and Saruta burying his head into his Maromi *dakimakura* (huggable pillow) in a posture similar to his colleagues who have been whacked at their desks. In other words, Maromi—not the phantom Shōnen Batto—is what killed them.

THE ANIME WITHIN THE ANIME IS ASSOCIATED WITH ESCAPE FROM THE BURDENS OF REALITY FACILITATED BY THE "SLEEPY-EYED" MAROMI, ITSELF A NARCOTIC IN ALL ITS MANIFESTATIONS: PLUSH TOY, HALLUCINATION, ANIME.

Episode 10 ends on an explicit staging of the issue of representation through media such as anime. After most of the staff is dead, the enraged and panicked Saruta kills the series production manager in the manner of Shōnen Batto and then gets whacked himself, apparently by Shōnen Batto, who, in time-shifted scenes that have been interleaved throughout the main narrative, has been pursuing Saruta's car as Saruta desperately tries—and fails—to deliver the *Mellow Maromi* tape to the studio on time. The all-important tape, however, survives. In an overhead shot in the night rain, we see Saruta splayed out on his back, (consuming) eyes and (consuming) mouth wide open and blood pooling around his head, hand still grasping the videotaped episode 1 of *Mellow Maromi.* A worried male voice out of the frame asks: "Is it OK?"—"Yes, it's okay!" replies a frantic female voice as the camera zooms in on the tape

that the woman takes from Saruta's dead hand. The tape is labeled in Japanese *Maromi Madoromi #1,* but it also has a number "10" on it, self-referencing episode 10 of *Paranoia Agent* that we are watching. As we watch the tape taken from Saruta's hand, the dialogue between the boy and Maromi from the opening of the episode continues before we cut to the two of them in the completed cartoon scene that was in the sketches of the opening:

> BOY: "I have no talents" (*Boku ni wa sainō ga nai n da*)
> MAROMI: "That's not true! I think you're just tired. Yeah, that's it! You should take a rest. OK?" (*Sonna koto nai yo. Kitto kimi ga tsukarete irun da yo. Kitto sō da yo. Yasunda hō ga ii yo. Ne?*)

Maromi then begins the same soporific chant, "Take a rest, take a rest, take a rest . . .," while climbing around the body and over the head of the boy. After the fourth iteration the camera zooms out as in the opening sequence, but this time to reveal the scene running on a laptop next to a Maromi *dakimakura* in a darkened workroom without workers—two desks have vases with a cut flower, apparently commemorating the deaths of their previous occupants. There's a quick cut to a box overflowing with extra Maromi pillows and then a close-up of a half-filled Maromi coffee cup between a pencil and part of an instruction sheet of scene retakes for *Maromi Madoromi #1* dated 19 April 2004, the original airdate for this episode of *Paranoia Agent.* All the while Maromi is chanting *"yasuminayō, yasuminayō, yasuminayō . . ."* The camera then moves to a ceiling position over the workroom before the scene suddenly switches off like a traditional CRT screen, nesting yet another visual frame of reference in a fashion that has become a trademark in Kon Satoshi's work (Figure 3).

This switch-off of the screen at the end of this episode—a simulation of our own switching off of the television or perhaps of a surveillance camera mounted on a wall near the ceiling of the workroom—makes all the difference in this repetition of the opening sequence. Whereas the zoom out in the opening places us in the site of production (the studio), the switch-off calls attention to the viewer-consumer/fan and the site of consumption (wherever we are watching this) and could be interpreted as a call to take a rest from anime (and consumption) itself—just turn it off because Mellow Maromi and its narcotic effect are dangerous. This paradoxical critique of anime within an anime is reinforced by the usual end theme and image immediately following. The multiple screens and framing in this episode emphasize that we live (and die) through layers of media and mediation that are complicit with networks



**FIGURE 3.** Framing the site of consumption and the fan's gaze. From episode 10, "Maromi Madoromi."

of consumption. The commentary that Kon develops crystallizes in the media figure of Maromi as monster, associated and on par with Shōnen Batto.

## ALL-CONSUMING MEDIA

This identification of Maromi as a monster in league with Shōnen Batto is furthered in the next episode, "No Entry" (*"Shin'nyū kinshi"*), which begins with a TV program promoting the *Mellow Maromi* anime series, followed by rumors that Shōnen Batto has transformed, in the words of one character, into a true *bakemono*. In response to this anxiety, the entire population—save for a couple clear-headed observers—turns to the escapist comfort Maromi brings. As a result, by the following episode, Maromi has quickly saturated the media, markets, and minds of Tokyo, creating a fanaticism that is displayed in a series of quick cuts of TV reports, with us in the position of viewers of the various TV screens. One such scene is outside a record store where fans of the *Mellow Maromi* TV show, adorned with Maromi character-goods, are queued up to buy the CD of the series' hit song "Oyasumi" ("Goodnight"). In another, a mother, holding her son who is sporting a Maromi t-shirt and holding a Maromi plush toy, explains to the interviewer that "It's his favorite, our house has become full of Maromi . . . ." The composition, movement, and lines of sight in this four-second scene are revealing (Figure 4). The dark, disembodied microphone in the interviewer's hand anchors the center of the shot while the mother's opening and closing mouth moves into the frame as the camera pans up slowly at a slight angle from lower left to upper right. Besides the slow pan, her mouth is the only movement in the scene and is visually as well as functionally linked to the microphone. The scene cuts to the next news clip just before the pan reaches her eyes, reducing her to a moving mouth that seems eager to consume the microphone, the metonymy for the media in this scene. The eyes that we do see are those of her son, staring past the microphone and, we presume, up at the interviewer. At the same time, mouthless Maromi's oversized eyes are fixed squarely—and unnervingly—on the viewer, who is in a position not quite aligned with that of the interviewer. Their size and shape tie in visually with the microphone, underscoring the relationship already established between the media, Maromi as metaphor for consumption gone mad, the consumer-fans of Maromi, and we viewers as consumer-fans of this anime. It is a relationship of mutually reinforcing complicity that defines a world of media-driven consumer capitalism that, short of total catastrophic breakdown, appears difficult to extricate



**FIGURE 4.** The birth of a fan among mother, media, and character goods. From *Paranoia Agent*, episode 11, "Shinnyō Kinshi" ("No Entry").

oneself from once ensnared. The boy in this scene, literally wedged between the nurturing and overindulgent mother and his other object of comfort and desire, Maromi, is depicted as bewildered at the formative moment of entering this world as a full-fledged "citizen," born, if you will, between the mother and Maromi. Lost is the innocence of the favorite bedtime cuddle friend once that same figure transforms into a media monster and is experienced as such, worn as a t-shirt over the heart of the child whose mother is unwittingly and yet willingly giving him over to this world.

This rapid series of news clips occurs just as the identification of Maromi with Shōnen Batto is made explicit when the wife of Chief Detective Ikari—who was investigating the series of assaults, until forced to quit—tells her husband's partner, Detective Maniwa, about her confrontation with Shōnen Batto. In that conversation, Ikari's sickly wife explains that she was able to stand down the monstrous Shōnen Batto by telling him that: "he was the same as that sleepy-eyed dog." We learn through Maniwa's sleuthing that ten years ago, at the moment of entering pubescence, Tsukiko made up a story of a bat-wielding assailant to mask that her momentary inattention led to her puppy Maromi being killed. She has essentially recreated that childhood incident in an adult context when under job-related stress. When Detective Maniwa, in the persona of "Radar Man," calls Tsukiko and confronts her

with this truth, monsters of the past and present appear. Visibly disturbed, Tsukiko is "saved" from the trauma of the news by her Maromi doll, who cuts the telephone line and tells her not to think. But it is too late—the demon-like Shōnen Batto beats down the door and chases her. Just as he is about to strike her with his golden bat, Maniwa intervenes and transforms into a caped superhero with a magical sword to stave off the monster long enough for Maromi to lead Tsukiko through a pink (i.e., Maromi-colored) door floating in isolation in the middle of the room.

The door that Maromi takes Tsukiko through leads to an imaginary nostalgic Japan made of two-dimensional (superflat) paper cutouts, where the now down-and-out Ikari, having picked up a Maromi key fob, has been tempted to find solace. This is a place, says one of the cutout characters, where "Shōnen Batto never comes." At the beginning of the final episode—called "The Final Episode" ("*Saishūkai*")—Tsukiko and Maromi meet him there, again with the drowsy "Maromi's Theme" playing in the background (Figure 5).

In the meantime, in the real world, the sudden disappearance of Maromi items creates a panic as people are swept up by a black ooze now destroying Tokyo and Japan at large. The Shōnen Batto–turned-black-ooze physically and metaphorically envelopes and consumes media and consumers. Frustrated shoppers scream "We want Maromi"; pedestrians and train passengers are passively absorbed in their cell phones (a ubiquitous media device throughout the entire series); news media is a talking head in mid-broadcast; and—to drive the point home—a gangster changes the channel on the television set—where the medium literally spews forth the monster (Figure 6).

Tellingly, the first victim of the black ooze shown, in a scene near the end of the previous episode, is actually a cartoon doll–obsessed otaku, which enacts the narcissism at the core of the media-consumerism nexus Kon explores. The otaku has just completed his masterpiece: a toy figure of himself wearing a Maromi t-shirt. When he looks down at himself, however, he is shocked to see that the Maromi logo of his real t-shirt has transformed into what looks like a representation of his own bare chest. At that moment, the Maromi logo on the doll turns black, prefiguring the onslaught of the black ooze. In a panic, he stumbles onto the street where he is promptly struck with a wave of black ooze. The sequence brilliantly suggests the negative self-absorption that that shallow consumer culture can create (Figure 7).

When Maniwa radios Chief Ikari with his theory of the Maromi–Shōnen Batto connection, he appears to Ikari on a black-and-white TV screen in the nostalgic cutout world where Ikari and Tsukiko are still willingly trapped. He explains that emotional dependence on Maromi allowed the monstrous



**FIGURE 5.** The flatness of the nostalgic past. From *Paranoia Agent*, episode 13, "Saishūkai" ("Final Episode").

growth of Shōnen Batto and that only Tsukiko can put an end to the catastrophe. Ikari, rejecting Maniwa's plea to send Tsukiko back, destroys the TV set to spare his and Tsukiko's conscience of Shōnen Batto and the pain of the real world. The cutout people rejoice and Ikari is almost convinced to escape permanently in this imaginary world, until his ill wife (who has always been weak and just had a heart attack) appears there to remind him of their mutual devotion and the value of accepting the real world while working through its trials and tribulations together. With the memory of his words to her at a time of despair—"a makeshift salvation is nothing but deception"—and of the love they have shared together in life, he, when confronted with her dying, has his epiphany and, with a baseball bat, smashes the 2D set of the cutout world, thus escaping the escape. As the cutouts smash to pieces, they turn into multiple Maromi dolls. He has seen through the delusion that was society's own collective making.

## TAKE TWO

In the climax of the series, the black ooze goes berserk, chasing down Ikari and Tsukiko as they flee. A giant Maromi temporarily obstructs the ooze from




**FIGURE 6.** The medium is the monster. From episode 13, "Saishūkai."

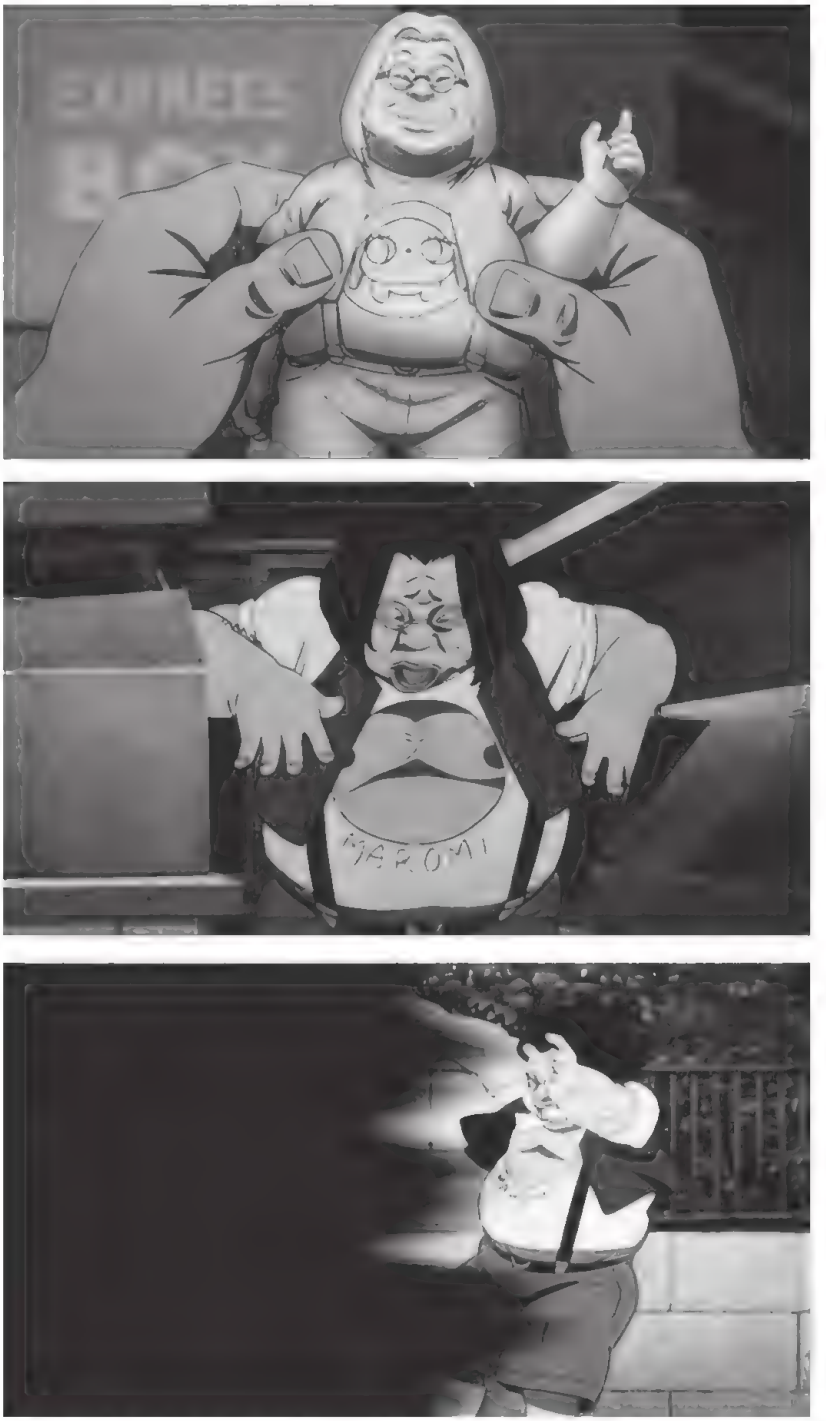



**FIGURE 7.** Otaku consumed as his own object of desire. From episode 13, "Saishūkai."

reaching them, but then is filled to bursting by it and completes a blending with it, thus visualizing the union of Shōnen Batto and Maromi. Not until Tsukiko gives up the lie (she drops her Maromi plush toy, which transforms into her puppy) and takes responsibility for her puppy's death through an apology while enveloped in the ooze does it stop laying waste to the city. Ikari then emerges from the wreckage and says provocatively as he surveys the damage: "This is just like right after the war," suddenly raising the issues of Japan's war responsibility and victim consciousness, as well as suggesting the role of postwar consumerism in occluding an honest recognition of the past upon which present affluence has grown. Japan's postwar rebuilding of an affluent consumer society is alluded to in the final sequence, which points to a new beginning—take two—of the same cycle we just witnessed throughout the series. A TV broadcast announces the end of a two-year reconstruction of Tokyo, followed by a repeat of the opening scene of episode 1: people on cell phones, music players plugged into their ears, faces in newspapers, and eyes closed on trains. These images are accompanied by a montage of conversation fragments expressing various excuses and complaints, including a close-up of a text message that implies an ironic critique of the medium we are watching: "What? That's an anime, right? Can't we see something more like a normal movie?"

The apparent answer is no, as this sequence cuts to an animation on a jumbo screen: a cat yawning and waking up as pedestrians pass underneath. Tsukiko, in what looks like a school uniform despite her being twenty-two years old, stops to look up at it and then continues on. We see Ikari back as a construction traffic guard and the unsavory hack journalist, Kawazu, on a cell phone trying to hawk a story as usual. Our screen fades to white and then fades into what looks like the same mysterious old man who appears throughout the series writing characters and symbols in some kind of equation on the sidewalk. As in his first such appearance, the equation ends suspended with what could be construed as katakana for "*a*" and "*ni*," perhaps to end with "*me*." We then see that it is not the usual old man but Detective Maniwa, whose now-white hair, widening eyes, and perspiring face show shock and fear. Then it's cut to black and "Maromi's Theme." After the end credits the white-haired Maniwa appears for the usual interepisode "Prophetic Vision" in place of the old man from previous episodes. He stands on the moon with the Earth in the background, with his final words suggesting that it is all going to begin again.

I have suggested, in a twist on Marshall McLuhan's formulation of the relationship between "the medium" and "the message," that in *Paranoia Agent* the medium is the monster. That is, mediated extensions of self—depicted

conspicuously throughout the series by ubiquitous screens, phones, character goods, and anime itself—bring about unsuspected and unnoticed (until too late) transformations in society and among individuals (McLuhan's notion of the "message"). Media- and consumption-driven relations and identities as depicted in *Paranoia Agent,* induce self-absorption, delusions, and a misrecognition and devaluation—a flattening—of "real life." By the catastrophic climax of the series, the initial threat, a bat-wielding boy on inline skates striking desperate and pressured people, has metastasized through media networks into a full-blown monster who feeds on their unreflective consumption of the media that permeates them. Media that once provided individuals with leisure, information, and social connections become the source of discomfort and disconnection, feeding in turn a desire for immediate comfort-through-escape that is made manifest in the mania for the character Maromi. Shōnen Batto as monster, and Maromi as monster, are thus in a circular complementary relationship with the consumer-fan caught in its self-perpetuating vortex. The Maromi–Shōnen Batto monster encourages "sleep" (or unconsciousness or even death), where "sleep" is a figure of disengagement from the reality of adult society and the responsibilities that it entails. The result is a narcoleptic state where one falls down or is beaten down asleep. As the ending of *Paranoia Agent* suggests, this mass-produced monster deforms self and societal development, producing and reproducing another monster that can be seen as the spawn of Shōnen Batto (monstrous media) and Maromi (delusional consumption)—a society of otaku manqué, the result of the mass production of otaku but lacking the aura of the original.

## Notes

1. *Mōsō dairinin,* dir. Kon Satoshi, TV series, 13 episodes (2004); translated as *Paranoia Agent: Complete Collection,* 4-DVD box set (Geneon, 2005).

2. Miyadai Shinji, *Seifuku shōjo tachi no sentaku* (The choice of the uniformed schoolgirls) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1994), 231–74.

3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1994), 7.

4. Murakami Takashi, "Superflat Trilogy: Greetings, You Are Alive," in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture,* ed. Murakami Takashi (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 161.

5. That the onset of Tsukiko's first period is, in a sense, at the source of the problem deserves further questioning: What does it mean to have this gendered and rather charged incident—trauma—surround the original deception and genesis of Shōnen Batto? Does Tokyo deserve to be destroyed because of a girl's natural reaction to a menstrual cramp?

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KERIN OGG

# Lucid Dreams, False Awakenings: Figures of the Fan in Kon Satoshi

## FATAL BUT NOT SERIOUS

"*Rear Window, Strangers on a Train, Psycho*—they're all wonderful films, sir, but when in the world are you going to get serious and do something animated?"

Entertaining as the reply surely would have been, it is hard to imagine an interviewer posing that question to Hitchcock. More's the pity: a director with a reputation for storyboarding and controlling his films down to the last detail might have found a natural home in what Howard Beckerman characterizes as "the least spontaneous of the arts."[1] What we are far more likely to see is the opposite question, one frequently put to anime director Kon Satoshi, here paraphrased: "You are a critical and commercial hit in Japan and abroad, you have world-class production capabilities and resources at hand with Madhouse studio, and you do things with animation that challenge long-held assumptions about the uses to which animation can and should be put. So you're going to start putting real people in front of the camera soon, right?"

As much as this attitude raises hackles among animation fans, it is understandable given lingering prejudices against animation as a serious art form, especially in the West. There is also the unavoidable fact that most of Kon's

films have a markedly "realistic" look: the action takes place against photorealistic backgrounds, movement is weighty and credible even when not perfectly fluid, and characters as a rule have normally proportioned bodies and faces. Kon sometimes underscores the contrast between his style and the "industry standard," most famously in the video store scene in *Perfect Blue* (1997) that juxtaposes Kirigoe Mima's fans with the Technicolor-haired, big-eyed anime girls seen on posters and cassette boxes.[2] While it is difficult to imagine Kon's outstanding use of trompe l'oeil effects being as persuasive in live action, it is not inconceivable, particularly given the state of modern CGI.

There may be another factor at work here, one not much remarked on but important: the obvious interest in and fondness for live-action cinema pervading Kon's entire body of work. Even when film is not Kon's main subject, his films are intimately engaged with the medium, often depicting the filmmaking process or commenting on our relationship to the movies as both individual viewers and participants in movie culture. Most famously, *Millennium Actress* (2001, *Sennen joyū*) celebrates and reflexively critiques the golden age of Japanese filmmaking, full of tributes to popular genres like *jidaigeki,* family drama, and giant-monster films, all framed by the making of a documentary that literally and figuratively depicts actress Fujiwara Chiyoko's "life in the movies."[3] On a smaller scale, Kon's debut work, *Perfect Blue,* uses the filming of a television serial as the vehicle for Mima's transformation from idol to actress, and even the relatively straightforward *Tokyo Godfathers* (2003) has Gin's repeated refrain that he, Hana and Miyuki are "homeless bums, not action movie heroes."[4] Most recently, *Paprika* (2006) opens with unambiguous nods to *Roman Holiday* (1953), *From Russia with Love* (1963), the Tarzan series, and DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952), all found in the unconscious mind of would-be filmmaker turned police detective Konakawa Toshimi.[5]

While these references serve a higher purpose in the film than mere winking in-jokes, it does not change the fact that they *are* winking in-jokes, little love letters to all the avid movie watchers in the audience that yield a pleasant frisson of recognition when we spot the reference. Kon has confirmed his cinephilia in multiple interviews, describing Western films as especially influential (perhaps not surprisingly, he commonly cites Kurosawa Akira as a favorite director).[6] Tellingly, Kon describes his collaborative process with his first screenwriting partner, Murai Sadayuki, as centered around film viewing: "It was fun, and we ended up watching a lot of movies together, with movie scenes and shots becoming our mutual language."[7]

Given all that, it is not surprising that Kon gets asked when he will leave the ink-and-paint ghetto and move into "real" moviemaking. But even those



**FIGURE 1.** Three of Kon's "biggest fans": movie lover Paprika, anime/manga otaku Kamei, and detective-turned-paranoia-phile Maniwa. *Top: Paprika,* directed by Kon Satoshi (Sony Pictures, 2007). *Center and bottom: Paranoia Agent,* directed by Kon Satoshi (Geneon Entertainment [USA], 2004–2005).

of us who pride ourselves on "knowing better" might start to wonder about that, if we consider how animation and animation fandom are portrayed in Kon's films. The references to his chosen medium are few and almost universally negative. Among the cast of the TV series *Paranoia Agent* (2004, *Mōsō dairinin*), for instance, is the stereotypically overweight, bespectacled otaku Kamei Masashi, whose apartment is as crammed full of *bishōjo* figures as his front porch is littered with trash bags.[8] Kamei's t-shirt pegs him as a fan of the heavily merchandised mascot character Maromi, an analogue to Tarepanda—in other words, another droopy little creature.[9] Viewers familiar with mainstream anime of the last decade will find direct references to *Love Hina* (2000), *To Heart* (1999), *Battle Athletes* (1997–1998, *Battle asuriitesu daiundōkai*), *Gate Keepers* (2000), and *Hand Maid May* (2000) among his figure collection, while nearly every poster seen depicts the *Di Gi Charat* (1998–present, *De Ji Kyaratto)* characters created by Koge-Donbo, adopted as the heavily merchandised mascots for the Gamers chain of anime and manga stores.

If the references in *Paprika* were love letters, the references in *Paranoia Agent* are letter bombs, any thrill of recognition quickly short-circuited by Kamei's disturbing behavior. In one of his first appearances, the otaku ignores the prostitute in his bed postorgasm to congratulate *his figure collection* on helping him get off. Late in the series, he appears so absorbed in making a new model that he fails to notice he has a visitor, while his suddenly animate figures complain that Kamei is "just a doll" who can do nothing unless they are watching him. Further, while aware of an approaching catastrophe, these PVC princesses are powerless to intervene because "look who we have for a master." In a testimony to Kamei's narcissism, the last figure he finishes before being swept up in the series' apocalyptic finale is of *himself.* Taken together, it is among the most damning and direct criticism Kon and screenwriter Minakami Seishi level in the series, only slightly removed from Dr. Chiba Atsuko's angry denunciation of a similarly obsessive colleague in *Paprika,* delivered almost straight into the camera:

> You get preoccupied with what you want to do, and ignore what you have to do. Don't you understand that your irresponsibility cost lives? Of course not. Nothing can get through all that fat. . . . If you want to be the king of geeks (*otaku no ōsama*) with your bloated ego, then just keep up all this and indulge in your freakish masturbation!

Animation production does not come off any better. To be sure, episode 10 of *Paranoia Agent* depicts the staff working on the diegetic *Mellow Maromi*

(*Maromi madoromi*) television series in a knowing and sympathetic way, gently ribbing the personnel while communicating their general competence and professionalism. The process, on the other hand, is depicted in a fashion as far removed from the paeans to filmmaking in Kon's other works as could be imagined. Here, animation production is essentially an assembly line process, impersonal work rather than an opportunity for artistic endeavor. (The only thing the staff seems passionate about is their mutual hatred for a particularly incompetent production manager.) The studio literally kills itself to get the show on air, each staff member just finishing their task before their visit from *Paranoia Agent*'s deadly stress reliever, Shōnen Bat ("Shōnen Batto" in Japanese, known as "Lil' Slugger" in the English dub). Throughout the episode Maromi offers helpful but bleak assessments of the various positions, putting emphasis on stresses and ailments peculiar to each: the producer "seems to suffer from constant stomachaches," while the episode director is "the most likely to end up with beard stubble." These asides suggest that, while the bloodbath we see is unique to the *Mellow Maromi* project, the hellish working conditions are actually close to the norm.[10]

IF THE REFERENCES IN *PAPRIKA* WERE LOVE LETTERS, THE REFERENCES IN *PARANOIA AGENT* ARE LETTER BOMBS, ANY THRILL OF RECOGNITION QUICKLY SHORT-CIRCUITED BY KAMEI'S DISTURBING BEHAVIOR.

Anime fans might at least take solace in the fact that they are not alone: virtually no hobby or area of interest apart from film going seems to get Kon's implied stamp of approval. With few exceptions, characters whose backgrounds include fannish pursuits are portrayed as deluded, childish, isolated, irresponsible, sometimes violent, and often monstrous in appearance. Even the Greek choruses in *Perfect Blue* and *Paranoia Agent* that critique the viewing/consumption habits of others pointedly refrain from examining their own,[11] which, as Susan Napier points out, have the very same disturbing implications.[12] It may be some cold comfort that these fan characters are more often victims than villains (although the special quality of victimization in *Paranoia Agent* problematizes this).

During a recent Q&A session at New York's Lincoln Center, Kon commented[13] that he would have been considered an otaku himself during his high school days,[14] and added that he is far less critical of his modern-day counterparts than his films might suggest.[15] When we explore the apparent contradiction that emerges in Kon's works between the all-but-unquestioned good of live-action cinephilia and the wretched excesses of any other form of otakudom, we find a number of surprising things, chiefly a tendency to

flatten expected hierarchies of artistic value rather than support them and a critique of hardcore fans that forces us to ask what function such negative portrayals of otaku might ultimately serve.

## RESISTANCE IS FUTILE: WE ALL DREAM IN PANFOCUS

While Konakawa's journey from cinephobe to cinephile frames *Paprika,* it is the titular heroine who appears the true film fanatic, her characteristic slyness giving way to unabashed enthusiasm whenever the subject of movies comes up. A more flattering (self-)portrait of the cinephile would be hard to imagine: clever, vivacious, physically attractive, and charming, Paprika is also the film's central and most powerful character. If she seems to have neither an encyclopedic knowledge of film history à la *Millennium Actress*'s Tachibana Gen'ya or Konakawa's (disavowed) knowledge of filmmaking technique, her love of the movies is presented as unpretentious and sincere.

Despite the repeated stress on Paprika as movie lover, her ability to change into fictional characters and archetypes is hardly limited to film. In fact, she makes use of specifically cinematic tropes only in connection with Konakawa.[16] At other times, she draws on a range of sources including Western fairy tales (her turns as Pinocchio and the Little Mermaid), Eastern legends (Son Gokū), and classical Greek drama (the Oedipal Sphinx). Consider, too, *Paprika*'s bravura title sequence, which has the heroine moving merrily not through films, myths, or literary classics but through *advertisements and logos*: the graphic on the side of a truck, billboards, the design on a boy's t-shirt, and so on. Later in the film, Paprika uses ads to navigate the dream-besieged Tokyo. Whether leaping headlong into an actual illustration or rendering a nonvisual source physically upon her person (as costume or metamorphosis), Paprika engages with all media as *images,* with no image off limits to her inventive repurposing. A similar point could be made apropos of *Millennium Actress*: fragments of Chiyoko's movies appear according to their ability to illustrate a moment in Chiyoko's narrative of her life, with personal relevance the chief determinant of their place in her reconstruction.[17] Kon and Murai never allude to these films-within-the-film's relative artistic merit or public reception.[18]

*Millennium Actress* leaves ambiguous how much of what we see is Chiyoko's metaphorized personal history and how much the plots of her films. By contrast, the very iconicity of the "clips" in Konakawa's dream makes it

difficult for the viewer to mistake them for actual events—*although that's exactly what the detective's unconscious mind appears to have done.* More precisely, it draws no distinction between memories of real life and memories of film as suitable raw material for dream production. In this way *Paprika* crystallizes an idea that runs through all of Kon's work: modern man is saturated by and exists through media; his mental landscape is a pastiche of movies, ancient myths, literature, television programs, memes, and images. Not merely an adjunct to human existence that we consume, stories also consume us, populating the mind and structuring our very interface with memory and reality.

*Paranoia Agent* explores the idea thoroughly, across multiple characters and episodes, but with a decidedly negative bent. Kamei is a relatively minor example; more salient cases include Shōnen Bat–wannabe Kozuka Makoto, a junior high school videogame freak who seems to perceive his violent assaults as one more level in his favorite game, and crooked cop Hirukawa Masumi, whose dealings with the mob, extortion schemes, and theft are juxtaposed ironically with the clichéd "code of honor" on display in the *seinen* (adult men's) manga he reads.

And then there's Shōnen Bat, in part an urban legend come to life. The phantom assailant made up by character designer Sagi Tsukiko gets picked up and spread by sensationalist media, then eagerly swallowed up by a public desperate for distraction from the pressures, mundanity, and anxieties of everyday life. From a slightly different perspective, one alluded to by their constant visual linkage, Shōnen Bat is also the new character Sagi's boss pressures her to create as a follow-up to Maromi. His genesis in the first episode subtly parodies the birth of such a character: Sagi generates an initial concept during her interrogation by the police, brainstorming Shōnen Bat's basic appearance as she sketches (Figure 2). The mass media promote and market her general description, and the public consumes and spreads the product. As if testifying to Sagi's skill in character creation, Shōnen Bat is soon as wildly successful as Maromi, with fan-victims piling all over Tokyo until the city—if not the world—is in jeopardy.

Curiously, though, Kon presents Shōnen Bat's creation in two parts. In the first, he has Sagi give only a rough outline of Shōnen Bat's appearance. Her sketch is a faceless silhouette, and she provides just a few details to the detectives: the assailant is a grade-schooler, he carries a metal bat and wears golden inline skates, and so on. In the second part, other key visual qualities like Shōnen Bat's dress, strange smile, and the bend in his bat are added—but not by Sagi. Instead, the figure's evolution from dark, featureless form to the finalized Shōnen Bat juxtaposes each new detail with an ordinary,

anonymous person saying they "heard that" Sagi's assailant looked like X or does Y (Figure 3). Significantly, it is only after this scene that the viewing audience sees Shōnen Bat within the episode itself (that is, outside the opening credits). The implication is that the public at large, the diegetic audience within *Paranoia Agent*, is directly complicit in Shōnen Bat's creation, reinforcing the received narrative if not actively embellishing it. Where they have *complete* responsibility is in transforming Sagi's ordinary (imaginary) criminal into a quasi-supernatural presence that can appear to anyone, anywhere, at their time of greatest stress and provide relief (of a sort).

Far from being passive consumers, then, the public actively shapes and refines the very notion of Shōnen Bat, completely repurposing the figure to fit their needs. While there's little formal difference between this appropriation process and the one carried out by the leads of *Millennium Actress* and *Paprika*, here it has apocalyptic consequences. Once again the split between positive and negative portrayal seems to break down along film/nonfilm lines; it also suggests the divide between Ōtsuka Eiji and Azuma Hiroki's models of media consumption in the postmodern age.[19] To really get a sense of what distinguishes one kind of fan from the other, though, let us turn to the one



**FIGURE 2.** The creation process, part one: Sagi's original sketch of her assailant. From *Paranoia Agent*.

character who during the course of *Paranoia Agent* effectively represents both poles: the tragicomic figure of Detective Maniwa Mitsuhiro.

## I REJECT YOUR REALITY AND SUBSTITUTE MY OWN: THE RISE AND FALL OF RADAR MAN

When *Paranoia Agent* begins, Maniwa is not notably eccentric or obsessive about anything, although his style of investigation is markedly odd when compared to that of grizzled veteran Ikari Keiichi. The difference emerges readily in the Kozuka interrogation: Ikari grows frustrated with the teen blithely going on about his favorite video game and orders him to get to the facts, while Maniwa encourages the boy to continue, consults the game's strategy guide, and even assumes the guise of "Maniston the Wandering Minstrel" to assist Kozuka in his storytelling. The rightness of this approach is immediately apparent to viewers, since the game characters that appear



**FIGURE 3.** The creation process, part two: the public embellishes/appropriates Shōnen Bat. From *Paranoia Agent*.

onscreen are thinly disguised versions of other *Paranoia Agent* characters. At the end of the interrogation, Maniwa follows up on "Holy Warrior" Kozuka's insistence that "an old woman of the Mi Jot tribe" knows the true form of game villain "Gōma," leading the detectives straight to the only person who witnessed Sagi's attack and can corroborate Shōnen Bat's appearance.[20]

This openness is typical of Maniwa's method throughout the series, its key feature a radical receptiveness to any and all potential sources of information, however tangential or even nonsensical they may at first seem. At various times Maniwa participates in online forums and shortwave radio networks where Shōnen Bat is a frequent topic of conversation, drawing on and contributing to the pool of collective knowledge. He comes to rely heavily on visions and dreams he experiences, where the words and actions of a mysterious white-haired old man (the "Ancient Master") seem to hint at cosmic-scale enigmas connected to Sagi's assailant. In the penultimate episode, following one of the Ancient Master's typically elliptical clues, Maniwa thinks nothing of chasing after one of Kamei's bunny girl figures when she appears before him in a shop window. All this is more than a little reminiscent of *Twin Peaks*' unconventional investigator Dale Cooper, and of the tendency of both that agent and that series to engage in what Angela Hague calls "infinite play": the dissolving of boundaries and rules within a game to expand the field of play and continue the game into perpetuity.[21]

GOING BEYOND HIS INITIAL DETACHED PROFESSIONAL INTEREST, THE DETECTIVE BECOMES AN OFF-HOURS HOBBYIST STUDYING ALL ASPECTS OF THE SHŌNEN BAT PHENOMENON, WHICH TURNS TO ALL-CONSUMING OBSESSION AFTER HIS AND IKARI'S OUSTER FROM THE FORCE.

It is also an approach that seems to anticipate Paprika, herself more of a "dream detective" than the "dream movie star" Konakawa suggests.[22] Although his repertoire is extremely limited by comparison, Maniwa can likewise assume costumed personas representing certain media tropes to aid in his investigation. In addition to the aforementioned "Maniston," he adopts the crimson mantle of "Radar Man," a caped superhero whose preternatural abilities allow him to hold his own in battle with increasingly monstrous manifestations of Shōnen Bat. In their final confrontation, Radar Man wields a literal "sword of truth" against the beast—to no avail, since Shōnen Bat swats him aside as if he were a gnat. It is an unceremonious kibosh on what had been the detective's moment of triumph, when he announced

to a stunned Ikari and Sagi that Shōnen Bat and Maromi are two separate manifestations of Sagi's disavowed and repressed guilt over a long-forgotten childhood accident for which she refused to accept responsibility. (Phew!)

The finale of *Paranoia Agent* backs up Maniwa's conclusions, so why does his attack fail so spectacularly? Consider the structural similarity of this scene to *Perfect Blue*'s climax: in both cases the mystery is ostensibly solved, yet the phantasm that has been menacing the main character remains and continues its ruthless pursuit. This refusal to give up the ghost—or rather, for the ghost to give up—at the proper time points to the inability of mere factual truth to resolve the heroines' psychological instabilities, e.g., simply identifying the ringleader(s) of the real-life harassment campaign against Mima fails to address her interior struggle to maintain her identity.[23] Sagi's case is slightly different: here, the "official solution" directly addresses her neuroses and could therefore be effective, but success depends on her internalizing and accepting it as true.

Given that he all but uses the phrase "return of the repressed" to describe the Sagi/Shōnen Bat/Maromi connection, that kind of layman's psychology should be well within Maniwa's grasp. It should be obvious to him that neither shouting the truth at Sagi nor charging the monster with a "sword of truth" will work. The question is therefore not why the attack fails but why Radar Man turns and attacks in the first place. The answer is as simple as it is counterintuitive: *this the only way he can prolong the existence of Shōnen Bat*. For Maniwa is himself an otaku, identified by a computer network address as "otaku.mousou.para," which we might render in any number of ways: "otaku.delusion.paranoia," "hardcore fan of delusion and paranoia," and so on. Going beyond his initial detached professional interest, the detective becomes an off-hours hobbyist studying all aspects of the Shōnen Bat phenomenon, which turns to all-consuming obsession after his and Ikari's ouster from the force.

The monster's appearance before him in the final episode is therefore the culmination of all Maniwa's activity. His entire existence has collapsed down to this single point; therefore, to tackle the problem in any truly effective way would dismantle his entire world. Notice how the fear and anxiety on exhibit during his solitary investigations immediately give way to the smug and cocksure Maniwa of the early episodes once he finally has a chance to reveal the fruit of his labors to an audience. In this light, even his purpose in revealing Shōnen Bat's origin becomes ambiguous: is this a policeman following his duty through to the end, or simply a show of mastery, of knowledge? The second half of the series sees the increasingly unkempt Maniwa

wandering the streets with a blanket tied around his neck, the real face of "Radar Man" and an indication of just how much the detective's self-image depends on the existence of Shōnen Bat (Figure 4). What guarantees his perception of himself as clever, authoritative, and powerful is the very monster he seeks to destroy.

Faced with the possibility of losing the object of his obsession and the very lynchpin of his identity, Maniwa opts to leave reality behind and live the fantasy. It is no accident that the monster does not merely absorb him, as it does everyone else in Tokyo, but *strikes* him, making Maniwa Shōnen Bat's final victim. In *Paranoia Agent*'s concluding scene, a near mirror of the series opener, Maniwa takes the place of his now-deceased Ancient Master in the mysteries surrounding the self-reinforcing feedback loop of anxiety and avoidance that culminates in the violent appearance of Shōnen Bat. The detective has all but disappeared; this newly white-haired Maniwa stares the same blank-eyed stare as the old man and uses only slightly less elliptical language. By the (dummy) preview of the next episode he is barely recognizable as himself, a pathetic figure made doubly so by his promise of endless mysteries in episodes yet to come *when there are no more episodes left.* The



**FIGURE 4.** Four faces of Maniwa: detective, otaku, Radar Man, and the new "Ancient Master." From *Paranoia Agent.*

result of collapsing all distance between himself and his obsession is self-annihilation.[24] Radar Man's leap is a suicidal plunge (Figure 4).

## WHY DO YOU SEE THE *MOE* IN YOUR BROTHER'S EYE BUT FAIL TO NOTICE THE BEAM SABER IN YOUR OWN?

One other rendering of "otaku.delusion.paranoia" to consider might be the "hardcore fan of *Paranoia Agent*"—not much of a stretch given the almost metafictional character of Maniwa's investigation. Viewers familiar with Kon come to the series expecting that it too will unfold in the genre of the fantastic[25]—that is, the strange goings on will never be accounted for by exclusively natural (uncanny) or supernatural (marvelous) explanations.[26] Consequently, we identify Maniwa's frenzied pursuit of both courses at once as the correct approach, even as or perhaps *because* he appears increasingly unhinged. (That just means he is getting close!) We share his skepticism of Ikari's skepticism, since Kon would *never* go for a purely mundane solution. "Following each stepping stone and connecting the dots, you will find an eternally recurring phantasmal castle"—Maniwa's final remarks, delivered straight into the camera, acknowledge our identification with the detective, which by this point is obviously somewhat uncomfortable.[27]

Still, he was *right*. Significantly, it is only after Maniwa's revelations that Sagi's characteristically blank expression begins to crack, the first sure sign of her breakthrough. This is hardly a unique case: contrary to the stereotype of the geek possessing stores of useless trivia, Kon's fan characters often provide the key information, insights, and eye-opening new perspectives needed to resolve the plot. We could point to the gossiping housewives of *Tokyo Godfathers* and *Paranoia Agent,* or *Paprika*'s Dr. Tokita (he of the "freakish masturbation"). Who is it but Chiyoko's biggest fan who presents her with the literal key to unlock her memories?

But mobilizing those kinds of insights in other contexts requires, obviously, awareness that there *are* other contexts. On the surface, *Paranoia Agent* would seem to suggest that what divides "good" fans from "bad" in Kon's universe is not what a person is, what he/she is a fan of, but whether or not they remain connected to reality at large. The common thread among fans portrayed negatively is that they use entertainment and hobbies as a way of escaping real-world problems; they shirk their responsibilities and drop out of the community. By contrast, Kon's cinephiles never (or rarely) let the real

world sink below the horizon of their interests. Paprika is emblematic: her real "superpower" is not that she can move through dreams but that *she is always aware of being in one.* She maintains a distance between her identity and the poses she strikes, and that allows her to utilize a seemingly infinite collection of myths, legends, and media tropes according to the needs of the moment. Characters like Tachibana and (eventually) Konakawa demonstrate that it is possible to pursue one's fannish interests, be a fully engaged participant in society, and stay healthy. The ideal position therefore seems be a kind of "distanced fanning": given that you are already saturated through and through with fictions of all stripes, and that even the lowest of low art may yield something useful beyond its sheer entertainment value, feel free to follow your passions—just do not lose yourself, and do not shut out the real world.

If "everything in moderation" sounds like a suspect moral from a director so given to collapsing the reality/fantasy barrier in ever more spectacular and bombastic ways, it should. While Kon's cinephiles appear uniquely able to strike a responsible balance between their hobby and "real life," they are also uniquely prone to small gestures of shame and embarrassment when they're "found out" as film fans. They only appear completely at ease with that side of themselves when they have symbolically withdrawn from the public sphere. It is as if acknowledging that they really ought to be ashamed of their deep interest in film is the price for not being lumped in with the likes of Kamei—and that possibility is not far off. If guilt-free access to enjoyment in general is the price of admission to "reality"—that is, socially constructed reality, the intersubjective network in which we exist, Lacan's "symbolic order"/"big Other"—then the ability to "fan freely" is likewise sacrificed. The seeming exception to the rule, Paprika, only bolsters it further: her near-confinement to dreams and nonidentical relationship to her waking-world counterpart Atsuko (a split subject if there ever was one) all but confirms her brand of unashamed, blissful immersion in her pursuits is impossible in the real world.

Perhaps this is why Atsuko claims she herself is unable to dream: Paprika's infinite pleasure comes at the other woman's expense. In Kon's films and elsewhere, the hardcore otaku functions a kind of "other of the Other," one who finds complete fulfillment precisely by draining us of our rightful pleasure. Refusing to abide by the un/written rules the rest of us live by, this figure also causes all manner of social ills. If this all sounds like a roundabout way of saying "the otaku is a scapegoat," that is because it is: the other of the Other conceals the flaws and structural deadlocks inherent in the system that

*actually* frustrate our desires. Rather than a real impediment to a smoothly functioning social order, it is a *structurally necessary fantasy* without which this "reality" would collapse.[28]

The tendency of Kon's plots to hinge on knowledge only otaku could produce/synthesize might therefore be understood as indicating these blind spots in the social edifice, mirroring Azuma's point that, while otaku may not be more self-consciously *aware* of shifts and changes in the zeitgeist, they do "most sensitively [register]" them.[29] Moreover, Kon deploys the straw-otaku in such a way that every pathology attributed to the stereotype is ultimately revealed as commonplace. By not rehabilitating or fully humanizing the otaku, the director all the more effectively dismantles the last defense of the nonfanboy audience against critical analyses of their own position (namely, "but I'm still not as bad as those [insert stereotypical trait] otaku . . ."). And given Kon's basic premise that our minds are always already saturated by fictions of all stripes, and that every one of us consciously and unconsciously uses those memes and tropes, it is hard *not* to see the danger of such an unreflective spectatorship.

IF "EVERYTHING IN MODERATION" SOUNDS LIKE A SUSPECT MORAL FROM A DIRECTOR SO GIVEN TO COLLAPSING THE REALITY/FANTASY BARRIER IN EVER MORE SPECTACULAR AND BOMBASTIC WAYS, IT SHOULD.

## WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY, AND HE IS ~~OTAKU~~ US

If there is a more pathetic sight than the underlying reality of Radar Man, it is the helplessness of the ordinary Tokyoites swallowed up by the Shōnen Bat monster—that is, by their own creation. Repeating *Paranoia Agent*'s opening scene at the end of the series underscores who's really responsible for bringing the apocalypse down on everyone's heads . . . and their continued obliviousness to it. Kon shows the world post–Shōnen Bat to be virtually unchanged: people still run from responsibility, find ways to isolate themselves even in overcrowded railcars, and distract themselves with the Maromi-like Konya the cat. As an assessment of society as a whole, it is bleak, but for that very reason animation fans may find something to grin about as a girl taps out a text message reading "What? That's an animation, right? Can't we see something more like a normal movie?" It is a rare vindication of the medium from Kon, a small encouragement for otaku, and perhaps a sign that those who take their entertainment more seriously than most have a leg up.

## Notes

1. Howard Beckerman, *Animation: The Whole Story,* 2nd ed. (New York: Allworth, 2003), 152.

2. *Perfect Blue,* dir. Kon Satoshi (1998); subtitled DVD (Manga Entertainment, 2000).

3. *Sennen joyū,* dir. Kon Satoshi (2001); translated as *Millennium Actress,* subtitled DVD (DreamWorks Video, 2003).

4. *Tokyo Godfathers,* dir. Kon Satoshi (2003); subtitled DVD (Sony Pictures, 2004).

5. *Paprika,* dir. Kon Satoshi (2006); subtitled DVD (Sony Pictures, 2007).

6. Kon Satoshi, "Comments from Interview with DreamWorks DVD Producer," *Millennium Actress* (official Web site), http://www.millenniumactress-themovie.com (accessed April 18, 2005). The site is no longer available, but this and other press kit materials are widely available online. See http://www.dvdvisionjapan.com/actress2.html (accessed 5 January 2009).

7. Kon Satoshi, "Interview with Kon Satoshi, Director of *Perfect Blue*," *Perfect Blue* (official Web site), http://www.perfectblue.com/interview.html, September 4, 1998 (accessed April 18, 2005).

8. *Mōsō dairinin,* dir. Kon Satoshi (2004); translated as *Paranoia Agent,* four subtitled DVDs (Geneon Entertainment [USA], 2004–2005).

9. Tarepanda is a character created by Suemasa Hikaru and licensed by San-X. As the name implies, Tarepanda is "lazy," "droopy," or "slouched" in appearance. The character's incredible popularity on its introduction in 1995 has been linked to anxieties over the Asian financial crisis of 1997. In the words of Sone Kenji of San-X, "Many office workers felt exhausted thinking about the dark cloud hanging over the economy, which had grown unhindered until that time. I guess they saw a little bit of themselves in the worn-out panda character, so they were sympathetic toward it." See Hamashima Takuya, "Stressed out? You Need 'Virtual Healing'!" *Yomiuri Shimbun,* November 27, 1999, 7.

10. For a sense of the actual working conditions on *Paranoia Agent,* see the "Paranoia Radio" roundtable discussion between Kon, Minakami, and Toyoda Satoki on *Paranoia Agent* DVD, volume 4.

11. A group of schoolboys in *Paranoia Agent,* for instance, seem perceptive enough to grasp that the hand-wringing over violent video games is overblown and mock anyone who can't distinguish between games and reality as a "loser." Within the same episode, however, the trio eagerly trade the latest rumors about Shōnen Bat, helping to spread the phenomenon.

12. Susan Napier, "'Excuse Me, Who Are You?' Performance, the Gaze, and the Female in the Works of Kon Satoshi," in *Cinema Anime,* ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 32.

13. Kon Satoshi, "Conversation with Satoshi Kon" (discussion with Q&A, Film Society of Lincoln Center, New York, June 27, 2008). From notes taken by author (no transcript available).

14. In his profile for the Japan Media Arts Plaza, Kon mentions a particular fondness at the time for manga by Katsuhiro Otomo, the "comic new wave" and girls' (*shōjo*) manga. He claims to have been reading the latter "all the time," adding, "I devoured everything

from Sh[ū]eisha and any other publishers." Kon Satoshi, "2001 Japan Media Arts Festival Animation Division Grand Prize Millenial *[sic]* Actress," Japan Media Arts Plaza, http://plaza.bunka.go.jp/english/festival/2001/animation/000372/ (accessed April 18, 2005).

15. In another interview, the director cites film, animation, and video games as legitimate ways of dealing with pent-up frustrations, adding, "To say sports are the only healthy way to release stress is a form of discrimination." Kon Satoshi, "Interview with Satoshi Kon," Gamestar, http://www.gamestar.com/11_04/pause/pause_disc_satoshikon.shtml, 2004 (accessed October 23, 2006).

16. This ought to give us pause. Like her waking-world double Dr. Chiba, Paprika is a psychoanalyst of sorts, and her current case involves a client who "dreams in pan-focus" but exhibits a visceral discomfort with movies. Having discovered this telling contradiction and resistance, is she exaggerating her fondness for film in an effort to unearth a repressed trauma? The film begins with Konakawa's cinematized dream, i.e., with Paprika's analysis already underway, and closes with the detective purchasing tickets to a movie, so there is no neutral point outside this arc when Paprika might declare a love of film and remove all doubt. Nothing in the film directly suggests she's being disingenuous, and I personally find it difficult to view it all as a cynical pose, but it's an interesting possibility.

17. Murai: "I wanted to intertwine fragments of Japanese history with the story of [Chiyoko's] life. In terms of craftsmanship, I wrote the screenplay underscoring the fact that she is the one telling the story. In other words, what she is telling is more significant than how the actual events took place." Kon Satoshi and Murai Sadayuki, "A Conversation with the Filmmakers," *Millennium Actress* (official Web site), http://www.millenniumactress-themovie.com (accessed April 18, 2005). This official site is no longer available, but this and other press kit materials are widely available online. See http://www.dvdvisionjapan.com/actress.html (accessed January 5, 2009).

18. The *Chiyoko: Millennial Actress Special Edition* guidebook is similarly mum about the artistic qualities of Chiyoko's films but does sometimes note commercial success. Madhouse, *Chiyoko: Millennial Actress Special Edition* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2002).

19. Azuma succinctly describes both in "The Animalization of Otaku Culture," *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 175–87; see also Azuma's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), particularly 29–54. The simultaneous spread of Maromi and Shōnen Bat is oddly similar to the proliferation of characters resembling Rei Ayanami post-*Evangelion* as described by Azuma in *Otaku,* (49–53), although it would be difficult to discern a shared "*moe*-element" between Kon's characters.

20. Perhaps not coincidentally, the first suggestion that the old woman may be a valuable witness comes from Kamei.

21. Angela Hague, "Infinite Games: The Derationalization of Detection," in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks,* ed. David Lavery (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 130.

22. Kon also depicts both Maniwa and Paprika falling headlong through a blue sky toward earth, the former in the *Paranoia Agent* opening and the latter when she enters Himuro's dream to rescue Tokita. The difference between Paprika's controlled descent and Maniwa laughing madly is telling, however . . .

23. In this way Kon thoroughly subverts the usual workings of the mystery genre, in which the "official solution" papers over the underlying libidinal economy connected to

the crime—hence perhaps the odd feeling at the end of *Perfect Blue* that Mima really has gotten away with murder. See Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 57–59. A case could easily be made, using Žižek's distinction between the two major genres of detective story, that *Perfect Blue* is more a hardboiled than a classical mystery.

24. See also Mima's stalker Uchida, who goes by the online handle "Me-Mania" and vaguely resembles Mima with his long hair; likewise Rumi, particularly at the end of the film.

25. And Kon is aware of his audience's expectations: "I think blurring the lines of reality and fantasy is an interesting technique. Since using it in my debut piece *Perfect Blue,* many fans seem to enjoy it, so now I deliberately choose to use it." "Interview with Satoshi Kon," Gamestar.

26. Diane Stevenson, "Family Romance, Family Violence, and the Fantastic in *Twin Peaks,*" in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks,* ed. David Lavery (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 70.

27. One final key direct address worth noting: every episode of *Paranoia Agent* ends with the image of an enormous Maromi staring straight at the viewer. The spot where Maromi sits is exactly where Shōnen Bat stands in the opening; the droopy dog is ringed by the bodies of the main cast, arranged in a question mark, with Maniwa as its tail and dot—and pointed straight at the viewer.

28. Žižek, *Looking Awry,* 18–19. Žižek often cites the figure of "the Jew" in pre–World War II Germany, or radical Islam in the United States post-9/11. In anime, there may be no more clear-cut example than *Revolutionary Girl Utena*'s (1997, *Shōjo kakumei Utena*) Himemiya Anthy: as the Rose Bride/Witch, she obscures the contradictions and traps inherent in the figure of "the Prince" and bears all the anger and abuse that results from desires frustrated by traditional models of opposite-sex romance. (Meanwhile, Utena and Anthy's road race to freedom in the film version [*Shōjo kakumei Utena: Adōresensu mokushiroku,* 1999, *Revolutionary Girl Utena: Adolescence Apocalypse*] is as on-point an illustration of the Lacanian "act" as you're likely to find in animation.)

29. Azuma, "The Animalizaton of Otaku Culture," 184.

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ERON RAUCH AND CHRISTOPHER BOLTON

# A Cosplay Photography Sampler

"Making icons out of their icons."[1] This is how photographer Elena Dorfman describes her portraits of cosplayers, a characterization that suggests the layers of representation in cosplay photography and the ways these layers can be peeled apart (or collapsed together) to shed light on how fandom is viewed and displayed.

Cosplay itself probably needs little introduction here. Originally a Japanese abbreviation of "costume play," it refers to an international range of practices centered on dressing up, particularly but not exclusively fans' practice of constructing costumes based on anime and manga characters and donning them at conventions.[2] But the cosplayer is really only half the equation: the other half is the cameraman (or woman), and there is a strong sense that the photograph is the privileged end product of the entire enterprise.

Cosplay photography is a form of fanthropology in the sense that it documents fan activities. But it also accepts the challenge posed by the editors of this volume, the challenge to speak about fans in new ways. Fandom is not a foreign object to be regarded by academic specialists from the other side of a divide established by our own cultural or disciplinary expertise. Nor is it an esoteric community that only initiates—only fans themselves—can hope to

understand. Ideally it is a set of people, practices, and phenomena that challenge and expand not only our received knowledge but our very systems of knowledge.

One useful way to counter the sense of fandom as a closed object is to see the ways that fandom inevitably redraws the boundaries between producer and consumer, viewer and viewed. Like fan fiction and *dōjinshi* parodies, cosplay is part of the feedback loop that allows fans to enter into a text and transform it, turning readers into authors and blurring the distinction between fan and critic, as well as reader and text. Challenged by these practices, professional critics have lately learned to read more like fans—reinventing their own approaches in order to interpret the increasingly seamless space of *fan + text*.

By making icons from these icons, cosplay photography adds one more interesting layer. The photographers (in or out of costume themselves) range from interlopers, to fans, to fans of fans, and what their photos examine is precisely the construction and confusion of boundaries between fan and character, fan and critic, or observer and observed. Some photographers try to erase difference by creating photographs that reproduce the visual qualities of the animated frame or the manga page. Others intrude literally or figuratively into the frame, forcing us to consider the social contexts in which these images are produced and consumed. Some allow fans to emerge from underneath their costumes or try to pry them violently out of character, while many question the sometimes facile divisions and fraught power relationships these kinds of operations assume.

It is futile or contradictory to construct a canon of cosplay photography. Photo-sharing sites host millions of pictures by hundreds of thousands of photographers, making it impossible to give an overview of this genre, much less a who's who of photographers. But perhaps this ongoing documentary (constantly shot but never edited) gestures productively toward an anthropology of addition rather than reduction. In that spirit, we have assembled a purposely diverse sampling of work that hints at the range of approaches in this new genre.

## EUROBEAT KING AND THE ARCHIVE OF FAN COSPLAY PHOTOGRAPHY

Several of the photographers discussed below approach cosplay productively from the outside, often with complex ideas about photography but limited

experience with the syntax and goals of the cosplay community. But here at the outset it is important to remember that all but a tiny fraction of cosplay images are made for and by the community, and come with their own very particular context that structures the images—a complex combination of conventions, history, geography, audience, and use values. Some of the photographers treated below (Elena Dorfman and Steve Schofield, for example) create images primarily for display and discussion within fine art galleries and for audiences of art buyers with no knowledge of anime. An image created by a cosplayer might have a very different but equally developed purpose—for example to showcase the sophisticated stitching on the inside of a garment for an online cosplay construction tutorial, or to serve as a memento of a convention.

Among fan photographers, there are certain insiders whose work clearly highlights some of the goals particular to the fan audience. An example is Eurobeat King, the screen name of one of the most prominent and prolific fan documentarians. He does not produce large gallery prints or strive for the single perfect image that looks like a photographic version of a *Newtype* magazine cover but instead responds to the cosplay community's insatiable need for documentation. His collection runs to over a quarter million images at this writing, housed almost exclusively on one of the main English-speaking cosplay Web sites, cosplay.com.[3] He travels extensively, trying to photograph as many of the cosplayers at as many conventions as he can. If it were possible to print all of his images in chronological order, one might tangibly see the evolution of the cosplay scene: the fans growing younger, the costumes becoming more varied, the quality increasing, the massive influx of female fans in the past five years, the ascendance of gothic Lolita styles, and the rise of "convention apparel" (using bits and accessories from costumes combined with street clothing).

Eurobeat King's online collection is the most elaborate example of one of the driving forces behind the rise of cosplay and cosplay photography: the increasing ease of image sharing, as digital cameras and digital storage get better and cheaper. Ten years ago a fan could spend twenty or thirty dollars just to develop a few roles of film at the grocery store and get a small stack of 4×6-inch prints to share with the local anime club. Today nearly every convention attendee interested in cosplay has some kind of networked digital image-making device (cell phone, camera, camcorder, and so on), and the growth of online forums, communities, networking services, and photo sharing has produced huge sites like cosplay.com as well as cosplay communities on image sharing sites like Flickr and deviantART. A decade ago, the highlight

of a convention might have been the panel by Anno Hideaki, but now the masquerade/cosplay contest garners by far the largest crowds and generates celebrities of its own.

It is most interesting and most useful to think of Eurobeat King's project and the online community's cosplay photographs not in terms of individual images but as an archive—for fans and of fans. To single out a given image here or even a certain style would be arbitrary. Each viewer traverses the archive according to his or her own criteria. A fine art photographer may look for "freaks" or formalism; a cosplayer might churn through nearly identical images searching for the one that shows his or her costume most precisely; a *hentai* lech may be looking for cute girls; friends might find images for their Web site to recall a particular convention, or browse uploads to scope out the cosplay at a convention they couldn't attend. The range of other uses is almost unlimited. The only constant principle is voracious inclusivity.

## ALAIN CAMPORIVA AND THE LEGACY OF CURECOS

Alain Camporiva is an up-and-coming figure among the more technical and polished photographers working within the international cosplay community. Figures like Camporiva, Tony Quan, and Antonius Van den Brink (known as "hell-rider") work with cosplayers on carefully staged shoots, using commercial photography skills to create striking images. Their work is part of a style that was popularized by the Japanese cosplay Web site CureCos and by feature shoots in the Japanese print magazine *Cosmode*. It is a style characterized by talented contributors, elaborate location shoots, heavy postprocessing, Dutch-angles, tropes borrowed from Asian science fiction and fantasy cinema, and highly attractive cosplayers in flawless costumes (Plates 1 and 2). These images became known outside Japan via forums on the image sharing site Chan.org, which had many posts that were picks of the best of CureCos.

Visually, the most striking thing about these images is that stylistically they are intentionally close to the primary sources that cosplayers use when researching their costumes. Images like Camporiva's resemble spreads in anime magazines like *Newtype, Animage,* and *Megami* sprung to life, with conventions such as tilted compositions, moody blue tints, high contrast, motion blur, selective focus, and ardent performances by the models, who have an intricate knowledge of the gestures and mannerisms favored by their characters. These are the kinds of images that inspire genuine passion among the fans.

IMAGES LIKE CAMPORIVA'S RESEMBLE SPREADS IN ANIME MAGAZINES LIKE *NEWTYPE*, *ANIMAGE*, AND *MEGAMI* SPRUNG TO LIFE.

Neither portraits of the cosplayers nor documents of the costumes, Camporiva's images are attempted portraits of fictional characters, crafted using a visual vocabulary internal to the medium of anime. (Here is a battle-ready swordsman in an alley, there an angel who has just touched down in the city.) In many ways, images by Camporiva, Quan, and their ilk are more similar to fan fiction or *dōjinshi* than they are to documentary photography. Yet the genre of what might be termed "photo play" (or staged film still) has a lineage going back to some of the earliest photography, such as Julia Margaret Cameron's nineteenth-century stagings of historical and literary works.

Within the fan community, these images also function as celebratory monuments to the best of cosplay and as community standards of excellence. Meetings between skillful cosplayers and skillful photographers produce images that get passed around on forums, and people aspire to be a "better" Yuna or Naruto. Images such as Camporiva's thus become part of the currency by which the skill and fame of cosplayers are judged. But while it is fairly easy to identify the function and effect of images like these within the cosplay fan world, the broader status of these images in relation to art and mass media is more ambiguous.[4] As with *dōjinshi,* understanding their rigid aesthetic requires mastery of a particular and very precise vocabulary of popular culture, but they are more than mere artifacts of that culture, and ultimately their wide range of possible uses demands a careful and flexible approach from critics.

## SUBCULTURE FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY

Cosplay photography clearly borrows some of its visual logic from high-fashion photography—both its formal features and its underlying assumption that the clothes exist to be photographed as much as to be worn. And subculture fashions like steampunk and Lolita may be influenced by the same fictional genres that inform cosplay (Plates 3 and 4). But a number of professional designers make strict distinctions between their own clothing lines and costumes.[5] Subculture fashion may involve role-playing or acting the part, but it is not about imitating a specific character at conventions or in other fan contexts; rather, it is about creating an individual look that becomes part of an everyday lifestyle and identity. Designer Samantha Rei cites

the broader cultural and historical origins of these styles to emphasize that the fashions exist before and apart from anime or manga characters that wear them: Ōtomo Katsuhiro's future primitive science fiction epic *Steamboy* borrows steampunk fashion, not the reverse. In other words, while cosplay participates in an existing literary narrative, subculture fashion enacts a social narrative of its own.

And yet fiction inevitably feeds back into fashion, and the line between the two can be a fine one. "If you lose the fake weapons and the little details that make it a bit too over the top," suggests designer Megan Maude McHugh, "you're left with an interesting outfit that people congratulate you on. Add the props back in, and people ask you if you're in a play or something." But the tipping point between the intriguingly original and the wildly theatrical can be difficult to locate—particularly in the dramatic world of runway shows and fashion photography—and it is always shifting.[6] Rei says her own work must continually raise the stakes: it must "be bigger and bolder to set itself apart since so many mainstream groups keep absorbing our aesthetics."

Finally one might say that cosplay and subculture fashion are both about an imagined ideal, but the latter holds out a stronger promise that we can refashion our everyday selves in that new image. The power of the model pictured in Plate 3, says Rei, is that whatever she wears, "she looks like she dresses that way on the weekends." What the designer, model, and photographer sell to the viewer is not only a certain fiction but the promise that the fiction might become real.

## ERICH HOEBER

Of all of the photographs represented here, Erich Hoeber's are perhaps the least documentary. The images in his series "Cosplay: Transformation and Identity" are structured toward figuring psychological intensity, an intensity born from lack of familiarity, from implied narratives, fractured identities, and suspected secrets, particularly the secrets of young people in masks of their choosing (Plates 5 and 6).[7] In the southern gothic mode of photographers like Keith Carter, the subjects of Hoeber's work serve as arcane symbols in a pantheon of the photographer's own devising. They are like a Tarot—here the Fool, here Death. At times it can be difficult to read past the expressionist presentation, though, and one wonders what particular quality cosplayers have that makes them appropriate for filling Hoeber's pantheon.

In Hoeber's photographic technique, we find the beginning of an answer. Every decision he makes serves to reduce the materiality of the physical subject ("people in costumes at a convention"), and instead he insinuates a moody narrative of an inner journey that goes with the liminal state that is cosplay. Cosplay is turned into a metaphor as Hoeber strips the color away and applies a severe vignetting that turns even the midday California sky into a bleak shadow. He employs a highly regimented compositional structure that crops almost all of his subjects at the waist. And he shoots with archaic cameras, using focal shifts to blur large portions of the image and a wide-angle lens to distort facial features.

THE SUBJECTS OF HOEBER'S WORK SERVE AS ARCANE SYMBOLS IN A PANTHEON OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S OWN DEVISING.

Bursting with symbols, Hoeber's work seems to embody a tension between cultural specificity and universality, reflected in these two statements about his work: "I made these photographs to show the people behind the costumes: their pride, their vulnerability, their beauty, and their bravery," but also, "For me, a great image is more than an image. It's a mysterious artifact with it's own special gravity."[8]

Hoeber is not interested in studying cosplay's signs on their own terms, but he is one of the rare photographers focused on cosplayers' internal worlds. Among the photographers in this sampler, he may provide the most focused visual interrogation of the simultaneous anxiety and euphoria of donning a fictional identity to fit into a group. If at times his work lapses a bit too far into psychological Romanticism, vague arcana, or visual Expressionism, it is courageous for its effort to address the nebulous question of "why"—why is the anime scene currently so obsessed with cosplay?

## ZAN

Although cosplay is experienced largely though online photographs, very few cosplayers use the opportunity to stage and shoot their own images of themselves. An interesting exception is Zan, the screen name of an ardent Sailor Moon cosplayer who creates studio portraits of herself in costumes she has crafted, and sometimes augments the photographs with Photoshopped backgrounds and effects to produce fun, direct images that show an utter mastery of the Sailor Moon style (Plates 7 and 8).[9] Were they drawn, these images could easily be spreads in a shōjo anime or manga art book.

While Alain Camporiva's work has the same goal of seamlessly recreating the source material, he strives for a more action-oriented, cinematic feel—a male or shōnen counterpart to Zan's shōjo idiom. It is informative that in form, Zan's work is actually much closer to Erich Hoeber's closely cropped portraits of psychological inquiry, but she does not use photography to pry behind the costume, as Hoeber does. Instead, she uses the costume as an icon. As the quality of the clothing, the perfection of the symbolic gestures, and the slickness of the photography all reach a zenith, the images come to represent an almost perfect empathy with the characters, while at the same time armoring and concealing the portrait model. For example, in one of Zan's images, the models are backlit and shadowed to the point of total silhouette, concealing both their costumes and themselves in order to better enact the overall visual style of the series. This method is the inversion of Hoeber's: here the camera is used to investigate the character, not the model. On its beautiful surface, this is a photograph of and about Sailor Moon. No more, no less.

THE IMAGES COME TO REPRESENT AN ALMOST PERFECT EMPATHY WITH THE CHARACTERS, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ARMORING AND CONCEALING THE PORTRAIT MODEL.

Yet at another level, this work clearly embodies an act of communication between the model/photographer and fans—fans of the series as well as fans of Zan herself. In the sharp, clearly lit intimacy of these photos, the subject maintains direct eye contact with the camera, an invitation to the viewer to join her in exploring the nuances of the primary text. Empathy and narrative play allow her images to be additive, rather than authoritative. They do not attempt to replace or deconstruct the master texts or the social narrative from which they are spun. Instead they use identity and the body to create commentaries, expansions, adulations, and interpretations of the original texts to share with other fans.[10] In this sense, Zan's work illustrates Dean MacCannell's idea of cultural productions as communal rituals:

> They are rituals in the sense that they are based on formulae or models and in the sense that they carry individuals beyond themselves and the restrictions of everyday experience. Participation in a cultural production, even at the level of being influenced by it, can carry the individual to the frontiers of his [or her] being where his [or her] emotions enter into communion with the emotions of others "under the influence."[11]

## STEVE SCHOFIELD

In his portrait series "Land of the Free," artist Steve Schofield photographs British fans wearing *Star Trek, Star Wars,* and Wild West costumes in their own homes.[12] In the process he highlights the migration of subcultural media and suggests the transformations and dislocations that are required for fan costuming to function across the Atlantic as well as the Pacific. How do subcultural forms travel? Do they have unique characteristics in different locations, or is Captain Picard the same across thousands of miles, just as he is in two neighboring homes in a subdivision? (And what does that say about suburban Britain and suburban America's similar or differing relationships with colonial power, as portrayed in *Star Trek* or the Wild West?)

While Elena Dorfman's work erases the traces of context and background to highlight the fans' awkward gestures and sometimes imperfect costumes, Schofield works with skilled costumers who have created slick, almost impenetrable surfaces.[13] Paradoxically, the costumes are clearly figured—whole, in focus, well exposed, and captured with wide lenses that set the spectator back far enough to see the whole view from the proverbial window. And yet vertigo still sets in—for example when we realize that one of the two Captain Picards we are staring at is a life-sized cardboard cutout posed next the costumed fan, both almost indistinguishable from the "original" and from one another.

As the fans merge visually with their characters, much of the psychological dimension is negated and the costumed figures begin to serve as negative spaces, compositionally and conceptually. The eye and the mind are deflected into the area all around these subjects, living rooms and front halls filled with other details that the camera voraciously records: props, figures, and other media related to the costume, but also everyday furniture, architecture, and the detritus of daily life. In a perversion of August Sander's "typologies" (but also in homage to them), Schofield plays media's slickness off itself, and the wealth of information in the periphery of the images reintroduces questions about the material and commercial social structures that serve as the set for these actors.

Staring at the smattering of items that lets us identify these kitchens, dens and bedrooms as the homes of fans (spaces identical to our own), we begin to wonder if the association between identity and costume is any more remarkable than the way identity is impressed and expressed by the rest of material and media culture we array around us—whether it is pin-up posters and model cars or print curtains and Berber carpet. If what is modulating identity is what's playing on the DVD player, it is equally what's on the walls

and shelves, things which are just as easy (and just as difficult) to change and rearrange. This final point draws our attention back to Schofield's own polished style and focuses these questions about material culture and identity formation back on the photographer, back on portrait photography itself.

## ELENA DORFMAN

Elena Dorfman is an art photographer who turned her attention to cosplay in her 2007 book *Fandomania,* one of the first photography books in a genre dominated by online forums (Plate 9).[14] As this fact suggests, she approaches the genre and culture as a kind of outsider. The provocative quality of her work may trace to the way it forces the viewer into the same outsider position.

In their detail, lighting, and featureless deep black backgrounds, Dorfman's photos appropriate some of the vocabulary of glamour magazine photography, but her subjects—both the people and the costumes—are often unglamorous. In their neutral, even blank expressions and their isolation within the frame, Dorfman's subjects often convey a sense of ordinariness and even awkwardness that contrasts starkly with their heroic characters and the heroizing animeic styles that dominate fan-forum photography. This has provoked controversy among cosplayers: some feel it represents a healthy range of fans, while others feel it elides cosplay's sense of fun and empowerment.[15] Dorfman has said that her aim was to show the person beneath the outfit: "to find out who they were behind the pose, to see their costume and who they had chosen to be but not to get them entirely in their character."[16] In a way, this would be easier if the photos included some additional context—some intrusion of background, as in Steve Schofield's portraits. But the intriguing puzzle of Dorfman's work is that she uses this posed idiom and lack of context not to enhance the illusion but to strip away the layers of the costume and the role.

One could argue that Dorfman achieves this effect by refocusing attention on the gaze of the photographer and viewer. If the awkwardness or vulnerability of the subjects reveals a person behind their costume, it also highlights the manipulated quality of the shoot and the photograph itself—a sense that the models are aggressively posed (rather than posing) and that the image is tightly controlled. There can be an uncomfortable sense of power and even violation in these encounters, but the photos also remind us that we find ourselves on both sides of these cruel transactions every day. Dorfman's

photos are definitely not about the characters, and not primarily about the cosplayers; they are much more about the photographer and spectator. As we look at these pictures and feel the welling of our own desires and insecurities, our own sympathy, empathy, envy, and scorn, we are forced to consider our own place in the (sub)culture, our own power and vulnerability. There is some truth to Carlo McCormick's statement that "What is compelling, and to a certain degree disquieting, about Dorfman's cosplayers is how closely they approximate simultaneously the most innocent and the most perverse aspects of role-playing."[17] This may be why *Fandomania* has produced such strong reactions from viewers, all the more so because McCormick's "perversity" belongs to each viewer as much as to the image or to cosplay culture.

Contrast Dorfman's images with more benign portraits by Erich Hoeber, where the happy confidence of the subjects seems to trace partly to the fact that Hoeber has captured fan and character on the same plane. If one has the sense of seeing the fans more on their own terms in Hoeber's work, those terms still include a heavy dose of fantasy. In this way, the unsettling quality of Dorfman's work highlights the role of the photographer and the viewer in the cycle of judgment and consumption more trenchantly than most other photographers. While her notion of documentary is in some ways the antithesis of Eron Rauch's, they have that virtue in common. For the uninitiated looking for a glimpse into cosplay culture, Dorfman may paint an idiosyncratic picture. But for those who have some familiarity with the culture, her work shows it to us through new eyes.

## ERON RAUCH

A professional artist who often works in documentary photography, Eron Rauch approaches the genre with an understanding of the history of documentary photography as well as long and deep experience as a fan organizing anime clubs, 'zines, and convention events. His work juxtaposes and bridges fandom and criticism (sometimes uneasily), with a viewpoint that is ironic and sympathetic by turns (Figures 1 and 2). His pictures often depict other photographers, or his own image reflected in a mirror, visual shorthand not just for his dual stance as recorder and participant but for the ways fan culture holds a glass up to its observers and fosters or forces self-reflection. "Making art with a critical relationship to your own context is an honest trauma," Rauch writes, "an act of increasing velocity that moves you . . . out of static, assumed relationships."[18]





**FIGURES 1 AND 2.** "Naruto Fan Group Meet-up and Photo Shoot" and "Near the Vending Machines," from Eron Rauch's series "Bridges of Desire." These photos were taken in 2004 at the Anime Central and Animagic conventions, respectively. Photographs copyright Eron Rauch. Used by permission.

HIS CANDID, EVEN SURREPTITIOUS SHOTS SUGGEST BEAUTIFUL, JOSTLED DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE FROM A HAND-HELD MOTION-PICTURE CAMERA.

My comments here are based on Rauch's published work, culled in turn from an archive of thousands of photos taken at conventions over many years. Rauch's longitudinal visual study takes in cosplay but portrays convention culture broadly, rather than trying to document individual costumes. His black-and-white photos convey a sense of being in the mix—of recording fan culture from within. His candid, even surreptitious shots gracefully embrace awkward angles and dim hotel lighting. Arranged in series, they suggest beautiful, jostled documentary footage from a hand-held motion-picture camera that has penetrated the interstitial, personal spaces of the convention: hallways, bathrooms, backstage, hotel beds.

All this suggests the living energy and activity of a convention, but almost against the odds, a kind of flattening takes place as well. Rauch's black-and-white palette and the grain of the film, his frequent indifference to capturing faces, and the way he includes printed, painted, reflected, or projected images within the frame—all this compresses the visual gap between two-dimensional media and three-dimensional fans. Some of the cosplayers in his photos look like literal cartoons, and despite the sense of reality in these scenes, the figures seem on the verge of being sucked into the background or swallowed into the page. This artificiality (this confusion of real and artificial) calls our attention back to the art and artificiality of the photograph, the archive, the documentary. Rauch's work thus gives us some new perspectives on fan culture and a certain perspective on our own lack of perspective as well.

## Notes

The sections on Eurobeat King, Alain Camporiva, Erich Hoeber, Zan, and Steve Schofield were authored principally by Eron Rauch. Christopher Bolton is the primary author of the sections on Rauch's work, on subculture fashion photography, and on Elena Dorfman. However, we would like emphasize that we have collaborated throughout. We would both like to thank Bennett Cousins and Jennifer Newman, who provided invaluable advice and information about the cosplay landscape.

1. Elena Dorfman, interview with The Independent Film Channel. See IFCNews, "'Fandomania' Photographer Elena Dorfman on Cosplay," video posting to YouTube, December 17, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PWN_3aW05w (accessed May 11, 2009).

2. For readers who do want an introduction to cosplay in English, the following are

good starting points: Theresa Winge, "Costuming the Imagination: Origins of Anime and Manga Cosplay," *Mechademia* 1 (2006): 65–76; Susan Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 149–67.

3. Eurobeat King's page on cosplay.com is http://www.cosplay.com/gallery/m18/ (accessed February 17, 2009). The URL includes his member number, 18, identifying him as one of the founding members of the site.

4. This problem of defining the status of these images within fan communities is made more complex by the fact that many of the people producing these images are photography fans as much as anime fans. They can often get as excited about a fellow photographer's lens as about their cosplayer subjects.

5. Information and quotations for this section are drawn from an e-mail interview Bolton conducted with designers Samantha Rei, Megan Maude McHugh, and Heather Luca, February 2009. For more work by these designers, see their respective Web sites at http://blaspheminascloset.com, http://www.meganmaude.com, and http://www.scoundrelles keep.com (all accessed May 6, 2009).

6. Consider that even mainstream fashion houses like John Galliano and Issey Miyake routinely produce runway designs that are just as outré as any cosplay ensemble.

7. Erich Hoeber, "Cosplay: Transformation and Identity," Web gallery, http://erich hoeber.com/galleries.htm (accessed January 29, 2009).

8. Ibid.

9. She is active under different screen names on several cosplay Web sites, for example as "Zan" on cosplay.com (http://www.cosplay.com/gallery/a1663/) and as "Saraqael" on deviantART (http://saraqael.deviantART.com) (accessed May 6, 2009).

10. Perhaps a starting point for comparison would be the early black-and-white "film stills" created by Cindy Sherman in the 1970s that mimicked the styles, poses, and glamour of old movies. Although feminist critics took up Sherman's work as a critique of stereotypes, her early photographs explored these Hollywood archetypes with a degree of ambiguously sympathetic identification.

11. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken, 1976), 26.

12. Steve Schofield, "Land of the Free," Web gallery, http://www.steveschofield.co.uk/gallery_lotf.html (accessed January 29, 2009).

13. On his Web site, Schofield says the title of the series expresses "a degree of irony when talking about personal 'freedoms,' when one would choose to 'copy' the look of cowboys, sci-fi characters and pop stars." But he also speaks about the "vulnerability and discomfort" of his subjects, and like Elena Dorfman and other photographers influenced by Alexander Beckers's dry, clear, formality, his work might be critiqued for limiting the subject's self expression in a way that also undermines fans' ability to feed themselves back into the media on their own terms. Given more space, it would be interesting to address this tension by placing the writing of scholars like Susan Sontag (whose famous critique of Diane Arbus addresses identity politics and representation in art photography) in positive friction with work that pays closer attention to the creative and social aspects of fan culture. Steve Schofield, "Personal Work," Web site, http://www.steveschofield.co.uk/bio.html (accessed January 29, 2009).

14. Elena Dorfman, *Fandomania: Characters and Cosplay* (New York: Aperture, 2007).

15. For example, see fan comments about Dorfman's book on Amazon.com or in the following threads on the cosplay.com forums: "Cosplay in the Media: NY Times Artical *[sic]*," March 9–13, 2007, http://www.cosplay.com/showthread.php?t=105996 and "The Cosplay 'Coffee Table Book,'" August 18–September 7, 2007, http://www.cosplay.com/showthread.php?t=123201 (both accessed May 11, 2009).

16. Elena Dorfman, interview with the Independent Film Channel.

17. Carlo McCormick, "Becoming: Cosplay and Identity," in Dorfman, *Fandomania,* 7.

18. Rauch also writes that "autobiography becomes subsumed by the camera's (re)presentation, which is not only the method but also the underlying metaphor of power and history." Eron Rauch, "Bridges of the Unknown: Visual Desires and Small Apocalypses," *Mechademia* 2 (2008): 149–50. That photo essay provides a more extensive look at Rauch's convention photography.

# Modes of Circulation

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IAN CONDRY

# Dark Energy: What Fansubs Reveal about the Copyright Wars

Can fans who break the law through online piracy ultimately help legitimate markets? Or, to put it another way, is there a market-oriented analog to civil disobedience such that breaking the law should viewed as an ethical means to improve the responsiveness of cultural industries? For most people in the industry, any unauthorized sharing of copyrighted material is piracy pure and simple. It constitutes stealing the fruits of other people's labor. For others, however, the worlds of media sharing, which include not only fansubs but scanlations, anime music videos, *dōjinshi* (fanzines), slash fiction, and more, all evoke complex debates about what's proper and what's property. Focusing on the example of fansubs, I argue that a useful way to reframe the debates about copyright and digital technology is to focus on the energy that drives the circulation of media and the devotion of fans, something I propose calling "dark energy." From a dark energy perspective, we can see some of the limitations of focusing on property and law as a guide to progress, and perceive instead the ways value depends on community as much as on markets. Fansubs offer an arena to explore these issues, as well as broader questions of the shape of capitalism, media, and fandom in a digital age.

*Fansubbing* is the practice whereby groups of overseas fans of Japanese animated films and TV shows ("anime"), digitize, translate, add subtitles to, and make available online unauthorized copies of TV series and films. Fansubbers view their work as contributing to anime culture by providing timely, high-quality translations of Japanese releases for free to fellow fans. The anime fans who participate in this world, either by making, downloading, or watching fansubs, widely acknowledge that the practice breaks copyright law. Nevertheless, many of these fans view sharing media files online as justified, and indeed feel that doing so can support anime and possibly businesses as well, provided certain ethical principles are maintained. Not everyone agrees, even among the fans, and the ferocity of the debate highlights the contours of an emerging transnational politics at the intersection of Japan's content industries and online fandom.

WHAT FANSUBS REVEAL ABOUT THE COPYRIGHT WARS IS THAT WE NEED A BROADER CONCEPTION OF VALUE THAN WE GET FROM MARKET-BASED LOGICS.

A conflict in 2003 between groups of anime fans is representative of some aspects of the debate as a whole. On one side, an editorial writer for the Web site *Anime News Network* (ANN) had this to say about the fansub group Anime Junkies:

> For the most part, ethical fansubbers have long adhered to the rule that you do not distribute a title that has a North American licensor. But *most* isn't *all*. There are some fansubbers that give the activity a very bad name. One of those groups is Anime Junkies.[1]

The next day a person who described himself as Anime Junkies' Webmaster posted the following response, challenging the notion that the group had acted unethically.

> We are an open group and we stand by our actions. . . . We leave it to the general populace to decide what they feel is right and wrong. Remember, the law is not our moral guide. The day people begin to stop living by their ethics is the day our society loses its humanity.[2]

One of the interesting features of this dispute is that neither side views the law as the measure of ethics. Rather, principles are developed by a citizenry composed of a transnational community of fans.

Fansubbing can help us grapple with some of the central concerns of media anthropology: "how media enable or challenge the workings of power and the potential of activism; the enforcement of inequality and the sources of imagination; and the impact of technologies on the production of individual and collective identities."[3] Might some kinds of piracy be regarded as activism that reduces inequality and provokes the imagination through new uses of technology and new forms of collectivities? The answer, I will argue, depends on analyzing a core contradiction in the politics of fansubbing: fansubbing is piracy that defers to market principles. In other words, what makes fansubbing interesting is that, although fans feel little compunction about breaking copyright law, they (or for some readers perhaps, we) tend to maintain a deference to ideas of promoting markets, at least up to a point. Yet we can see why trying to measure the effects of fansubs in terms of the anime market is impossible. The industry claims that unauthorized downloads of anime diminish sales, while fansubbers tend to view their actions as contributing to an increase in anime fans, and both sides would like to see a widening anime market. But there is no way to compare the market as it stands now with an imagined market (either better or worse) without fansubs. What fansubs reveal about the copyright wars is that we need a broader conception of value than we get from market-based logics.

## DARK ENERGY

I propose focusing on "dark energy," which is my term for a collection of social forces that enlivens the connections between content and desire that in turn drives the circulation of media. I call it "dark energy" because some of these forces operate through the darknet of peer-to-peer file sharing networks and because a strict focus on piracy and commodification tends to dismiss the productive capacity of this power (i.e., making it unseen). I borrow the term "dark energy" from a finding in cosmology.[4] Since the Big Bang, the universe has been expanding. Recently, it has been discovered that the universe's expansion is accelerating due to some unseen antigravitational force. This force has been called "dark energy," and it is driving the galaxies apart faster now than in the past. No one knows what this dark energy is or how it operates, but astrophysicists postulate its existence based on measurements of the motion of galaxies.

Dark energy provides a metaphor for thinking about the expanding cultural universe of anime, and more generally as a way of theorizing the spread

of cultural forms in terms of the networked interactions between fans, content, technology, and producers. Since popularity is enlivened by particular feedback loops and network effects, dark energy draws attention to the flows that surround the moments of commodification. Like a river that draws together many sources, passes through a dam, then flows on, the dam represents the moment of commodification, the place where the energy of the river is turned into commodifiable electricity. Dark energy evokes the larger, flowing system, not just the element that can be packaged and sold.

Dark energy is not unique to anime fandom, nor simply characteristic of online file sharing, but more broadly provides a way of conceptualizing the fluid links between fans, media content, technology, and producers. In this regard, fansubbers provide insight into the forces that drive transnational flow of "cool Japan" products like anime. Additionally, the concept of dark energy provides a more nuanced understanding of the networked interactions between fans and producers, and content and technology, than we get from current debates over piracy and commodification. Fansubs also reveal that our understanding of "Japaneseness" should include more than the formal features of content from Japan, to acknowledge that Japaneseness is also produced by the practices of non-Japanese fans. I also want to suggest that the dark energy can at times reinforce, at times undermine, the existing structures and social practices of global media.

## CONTEMPORARY MEDIA TRANSFORMATIONS

Media scholar Henry Jenkins points out that media is changing at the beginning of the twenty-first century in two contradictory directions.[5] On one hand, we are witnessing ever greater consolidation among major media companies, who increasingly seek to leverage their power across platforms. On the other hand, personal computers and the Internet are putting into the hands of consumers the ability to reach global audiences, at times with blatant disregard for copyright law. Jenkins argues that media analysts tend to focus on one or the other aspect of change but that the challenge is to analyze both at once. Moreover, for too long the assumption has been that new media, with its interactivity, digital flexibility, and long-tail (niche) audiences, would replace old media, with its one-way, broadcast, mass-market ideologies and technologies. But the new has not replaced the old.

Jenkins argues that "convergence" is the new paradigm for understanding this moment of media transition:

> By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.[6]

Convergence, for Jenkins, does not refer to technologies of television, computing, mobile phones, iPods, and so on converging into a single black box but rather a convergence that occurs across technologies and media sources to coalesce in the minds of the audience members who participate in piecing together this hybrid flow. In the *Matrix* franchise, for example, the trilogy of films tells only parts of the story; other parts must be filled in through consumption of the video games, the short animated films (the *Animatrix* collection), comic books, and so on. Jenkins says that one consequence is that producers have to conceive of storytelling in "transmedia" terms, and fans must consume across media to get the whole story. In this regard, convergence is not about new media replacing old media, but rather about new articulations between businesses and fan activities. In Jenkins's words, convergence is a paradigm shift, because it signals "a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels" and "toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture."[7] What intrigues me is the way Jenkins encourages us to see the consonances between the worlds of big media and those of consumer-producers (or "prosumers" as they are sometimes called).

A bit like Jenkins transposed to a different key, cultural anthropologist Anne Allison considers convergences between children's play with Japanese toys such as *Pokémon* and contemporary global capitalism.

> Because *pokémon* are a fluid currency—cute but powerful, alienable and inalienable, a form of both capital and companionship—they have affective as well as "market" value and mix (up) different economic logics: the communicative spirit of gift exchange and the addictive frenzy of capitalist acquisition.[8]

One of Allison's contributions is to highlight the ways that cultural goods and practices often work not by bringing into focus a particular ideological coherence or value system but sometimes, quite the opposite, by blurring boundaries, for example, between friendship (unfettered sociability) and market relations (alienation). The Japanese toys, or "millennial monsters," that Allison analyzes, and which increasingly enchant children around the

WHAT MAKES FANSUBBING POTENTIALLY REVOLUTIONARY IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT CARVES OUT A SPACE THAT REJECTS SOME FREE-MARKET PRINCIPLES, WHILE PUTTING CROSS-MEDIA FLOWS IN THE HANDS OF CONSUMERS.

globe, reinforce very contemporary capitalist principles while disguising this process as play. The magical schoolgirl TV series *Sailor Moon* does something similar, Allison argues, in the way it "embodies the cultural logic of post-Fordism: fragmentation, flexibility, customization" through the transformations (*henshin*) of the show's characters.[9] Significantly, she focuses on children's toys, where fans' power to speak back, as it were, through piracy is less pronounced. One question that Allison's work raises, therefore, is whether the production–consumption dynamic characterized by fansubbing results in a similar reinforcing of post-Fordist capitalist principles, even though, at the same time, it is viewed by practitioners as operating in a sphere where copyright (and market relations in general) are selectively downplayed.

I would like to take these arguments in a somewhat different direction. For Jenkins, the convergence happens in the minds of consumers when they actively draw together disparate parts of an ongoing, transmedia story. He captures something important going on in media in the sense of complementing media-specific analysis with attention to flows across media platforms. With YouTube and other online sources, it makes little sense to talk of TV studies as something separate from Internet studies. But Anne Allison shows us as well that the convergence of stories across media can also implicitly convey understandings of capitalism, naturalizing the processes of acquisitive consumerism through logics of play. What makes fansubbing potentially revolutionary, therefore, is the possibility that it carves out a space that rejects some free-market principles, while putting cross-media flows in the hands of consumers. This is why I propose theorizing not the transmedia stories or the capitalist logics of play and consumerism but the energy that arises from intensified flows, the dark energy that cannot be explained by economic forces alone.

## MEDIA MARKETS AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

I was initially drawn to fansubs because they seemed to challenge the principles of neoliberalism, that is, ideology and institutions aimed at supporting "free markets." As cultural geographer David Harvey describes it, a central

tenet of neoliberalism is that the "market is presumed to work as an appropriate guide—an ethic—for all human action."[10] Markets depend on commodification and respect for private property, and the sharing, or piracy, of media online challenges this ethic. Again, Harvey:

> Commodification presumes the existence of property rights over processes, things, social relations, that a price can be put on them, and that they can be traded subject to legal contract. . . . In practice, of course, every society sets some bounds on where commodification begins and ends. Where the boundaries lie is a matter of contention.[11]

Fansubbing points to the contentiousness of these boundaries and also the need to theorize "society" that crosses national boundaries, as the community of anime fans does. Of course, copyright law in Japan and the United States is unambiguous in its protection of all anime titles, whether they are licensed in the United States or not. But in practice, commodifying "content" depends on a complex mixture of technologies, practices, and ideologies. With the spread of consumer-driven sources of media such as YouTube, MySpace, Mixi, NicoNicoDōga, and peer-to-peer networks, fan practices clearly pose a challenge to commodification, but they are not as antimarket as I had originally thought. Moreover, media companies themselves tend to look favorably on independent blogging and viral marketing, which is driven by motivations quite similar (if not identical) to those that lead to "online piracy."

At the same time, some programmers of peer-to-peer file-sharing software view their work as a much-needed challenge to the money politics that guides so much of contemporary media. While entertainment industries tend to regard unauthorized uses of BitTorrent as piracy, the makers of BitTorrent argue, to the contrary, that their software is above all "a free speech tool" because it "gives you the same freedom to publish previously enjoyed by only a select few with special equipment and lots of money."[12] New digital technologies can reconstitute the power of media, which in the broadcast era was, and to a large extent still is, dominated by wealthy elites and powerful corporations. The makers of BitTorrent contend that their technology can help produce a more democratic public sphere by mitigating the distortions of wealth.

There is a technical dimension to these notions of democratic participation. BitTorrent is impressive in the way it has eased the sharing of large media files through "swarm downloading," whereby files are broken up into small chunks, and everyone in the process of downloading a particular file

also uploads pieces of the file at the same time. In the days of the original Napster from 1999 on, the most-sought-after files would run into bandwidth problems as people tried to download from single sources. With BitTorrent, the more people who want the file, the faster everyone can get it. BitTorrent users also encourage those with the entire file to keep sharing as "seeders" (those with the whole file) and not simply be "leechers" (those on the network only when downloading the file). Seeders are necessary to keep active the circulation of the file. In very practical terms, the distinction between "broadcaster" and "consumer" is blurred by users of BitTorrent. Bram Cohen, the creator of BitTorrent, even adopted a motto for his software: "Give and Ye Shall Receive." Fansubbing, however, brings to the fore a somewhat different range of issues in that BitTorrent can be used in legal or illegal ways, but fansubbing's ethics depend on reformulating traditional notions of fair use.

## FANSUBS, TECHNOLOGY, AND COPYRIGHT

It is worth noting that fansubbing originated well before the Internet. Sean Leonard, past president of the MIT Anime Club, provides a detailed description of the early history of American fans' efforts to translate Japanese anime using video-editing technology and distributing their own versions by videotape via postal mail.[13] He discusses how some of the participants of the early anime fan groups in the United States were the ones who started distribution businesses, albeit after many fits and starts, and he sees this as evidence that fansubs have had a positive impact on the spread of anime. More broadly, he argues that a "proselytization commons," whereby fans could convert new fans to anime through share-and-share-alike practices, was the key to anime globalization. Personally, I do not like the term "proselytization" to describe fan activities because, despite some overlaps, religions operate fairly differently from fandom, particularly in the ways institutional hierarchies, sacred texts, and divinity play important roles. But, like others who emphasize the underlying desires and evolving technologies that enable media sharing,[14] Leonard's work is important for reminding us that "Napsterization" can be found in cultural practices reaching back centuries.

Today, the sharing of fan material has exploded online. One popular Web site, AnimeSuki.com, lists thousands of shows available for download using BitTorrent, with about a dozen new episodes or films released online every day. In October 2005, for example, they provided links drawn from 288 different fansub groups. Judging from nostalgic postings on online discussion

forums, the number of fansub groups has grown dramatically in recent years. Fansubs of popular shows often appear within days of their initial broadcast in Japan, and, once downloaded, can be watched on a computer or TV at close to broadcast quality. Some TV series such as *Ergo Proxy* and *Gundam* 00 are distributed in high-definition formats with 5.1 sound. Other Web sites, too, can help you find fansubs of Japanese anime not only in English but also in Chinese, French, Spanish, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, and other languages as well. Although fansubbers receive no money for the work they do, they will accept donations to offset the costs of bandwidth. In contrast to YouTube postings, the fansubs are higher resolution and managed more directly by the fansub groups themselves.

SOME OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FANSUBS AND OFFICIAL DVDS ARE STRIKING. FANSUB TRANSLATIONS ARE GENERALLY MORE DETAILED, MORE VISUALLY PLEASING, AND THEY PROVIDE MORE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DEPTH THAN THE COMMERCIAL RELEASES.

The anime television series *Samurai Champloo* (2004) offers examples of how the work of fansubbers differs from official overseas (outside Japan) TV broadcasts and DVD releases. In *Samurai Champloo,* the director Watanabe Shin'ichirō, a voracious music fan, drew inspiration from hip-hop DJs' sampling and remixing of old jazz and soul albums. He proposed using similar techniques to sample and remix old samurai stories in a way that could attract audiences today. This is one of the things that makes *Samurai Champloo* engaging and intellectually challenging, namely, the way this remix aesthetic eschews museum-piece "tradition" and embraces the constructedness of alternative identities. The series is set in the Edo period (1600–1868) but only loosely, because the time frame jumps around depending on the episode, sometimes appearing to be the mid-1800s and, in other episodes, the early 1600s. This allows Watanabe to explore various social divisions in Japan, including oppression of Okinawans, Ainu, Christians, and foreigners.

Some of the differences between the fansubs and official DVDs are striking. Fansub translations are generally more detailed, more visually pleasing, and they provide more linguistic and cultural depth than the commercial releases. The fansubs for *Samurai Champloo* included on-screen explanations of food like *dango* (rice dumplings) and *monjayaki*. In episode 1, one fansub clarified that "Edo is the old name for Tokyo," whereas the DVD release leaves "Edo" untranslated. Translations notes are often added to fansubs to explain esoteric references. Consider episode 18, "War of Words," for example, which reimagines what competition between members of a martial arts *dōjō* would look like if, instead of martial arts, the groups competed by "tagging" graffiti

in the most outrageous places. The fansub group, Anime Forever, included an explanatory image at the beginning of the show. In the official DVD release by Geneon, the subtitles are only in English and the roman alphabet, and do not include the hiragana syllabary. Fansub groups clearly recognize that part of the interest of fans who prefer "subs not dubs" (subtitled episodes rather than English voiceovers) is that they want to learn the Japanese language. Thus it is important to explain the use of numbers to represent words as well, as the graffiti artists write 4-6-4-9 to mean "yo-ro-shi-ku" ("Nice to meet you," roughly). The note about the *dōjō* sign is also a critical aspect of this episode, because otherwise it would not be clear why the *dōjō* leader would commit suicide rather than remove the sign of his *dōjō*. None of these subtleties are explained in the officially released DVD. In addition, fansubs of the series often go to great lengths to explain jokes embedded in dialogue or in the background, and obscure references to popular culture icons in Japan.

CLEARLY, FANSUBBERS ARE MOTIVATED IN PART BY A COMMITMENT TO CRAFTSMANSHIP AND A DESIRE TO HAVE THAT SENSIBILITY APPRECIATED BY VIEWERS.

We can see how fansubbers construct ideas of Japaneseness through attention to language, cultural references, and even history, sometimes implying a greater level of authenticity than even the creators would claim. On the official Japanese Web site for the *Samurai Champloo* TV show, the front page includes this message (in English): "This work of fiction is not an accurate historical portrayal. like we care. now shut up and enjoy the show."[15] Yet when the English-language fansub group, Shinsen-Subs, provided the translation for episode 24, they went to great lengths to explain the context of the show in terms of the history of the uprising called Shimabara no Ran.

Why go to all this trouble? What drives this dark energy? Status on the scene is clearly part of the story. In February 2005, the Web site Baka-Updates.com listed five fansub groups working on the first season's episodes of *Samurai Champloo,* namely, Anime-Kraze, Anime-Station, Aoi-Anime, AnimeForever, and AnimeOne,[16] and clearly the groups were at some level competing with each other. This characteristic of competitive teams helps clarify why people "do work for free." Artists, amateur athletes, and academics similarly exhibit devotion to honing their skills and exemplify noneconomic motivations. Other fans use particular fansub groups as a guide to the important anime to download. Sometimes fansubbers do receive the kind of feedback they desire. Consider this posting from someone who worked with the fansub group Anime Empire:

> Despite the things I had to endure (and the few times I didn't wake up in time, and held up the whole team . . . gomen ><), it all worked out in the end when I can finally sit back, relax, and look at the result of all that hard work. I actually had a friend approach me and say, "You should check out this great anime by Anime-Empire called 'Midori no Hibi'! It's simply amazing!" Although the anime itself was what did it for her, it made me very happy to know that I, along with the great people I worked with on that project, have helped this person enjoy anime the way it was meant to be enjoyed. I had to turn my face away from her to wipe my tears :3[17]

Clearly, fansubbers are motivated in part by a commitment to craftsmanship and a desire to have that sensibility appreciated by viewers. As groups attain status on the scene, I have heard some anime fans express devotion to particular fansub groups, as in "I will only watch *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* if it is the Laughing Man Fansubs translation."

Cultural studies scholar Matt Hills highlights the betwixt and between character of fans, focusing on the contradictions within fandom and the cultural negotiations these entail, as the key to understanding fan dynamics.[18] What fansubbers reveal is a logic of transnational desire bound up with the motivation to educate a curious audience of fellow anime fans. The pedagogical orientation of fansubs, explaining words, *kana,* obscure references and jokes, all reflect a desire to teach. Of course, this desire to demonstrate expertise also reminds us that fandom is about participation but also about status. Yet importantly, it is status that is not monetary as much as it is communitarian and aesthetic.

## "ETHICAL FANSUBBING" AS MARKET DISOBEDIENCE

Since fansubs represent an effort to make up for perceived industry shortcomings, the practice can be seen as analogous to civil disobedience. If civil disobedience is the "refusal to obey governmental demands or commands especially as a nonviolent and usually collective means of forcing concessions from the government,"[19] then market disobedience can be described as a way to force action on the part of the industry.

Much of the fansubbing discourse begins with the first principle, "What is good for anime?" Although some fansub groups accept "donations" to offset the costs of bandwidth, they often distribute their translations with the

stipulation that their fansubs are "Not for sale, rent, or eBay." In online forums, I've seen users who admit to buying fansubs on eBay face harsh flames. The explicitly noncommercial aspect of fansubbing keeps it in the realm of "a hobby" and, in that sense, provides some grounds for the defense that they are not profiting from the work of others. Between the black market for bootleg sales and the white market of official distributors lies the gray zone where dark energy drives different kinds of groups. There is nevertheless a moral economy at work within this grey zone.

Participants in the subtitling and sharing scene make moral distinctions depending on whether a show is licensed in the translated language's market and whether a show has been released on DVD. It might help to consider four categories of unauthorized digital media in order from "more ethical" to "less ethical."

1. fansubs of unlicensed shows
2. fansubs of shows licensed but not yet released on DVD in the United States
3. fansubs of shows licensed and released as DVDs
4. rips (i.e., direct copies) of released DVDs

All of these media forms are circulated without money changing hands, and therefore this differs from commercial bootlegging. In general, the most morally upright groups are those who translate and share unlicensed anime. These are shows that no American distributor has shown enough interest in to license from Japan. Fansubbers argue that such fansubs are not hurting the industry, because the shows aren't available anyway.

The issue with Anime Junkies, introduced at the beginning of this essay, arose because after the TV series *Ninja Scroll* began airing in Japan, the U.S.-based company Urban Vision licensed the title. The Webmaster for Anime Junkies explained their reaction, namely, that they ceased making new translations but kept the already finished translations available.[20] The Webmaster saw this as a middle ground between two extreme attitudes: on one hand, that all fansubs are wrong, or on the other, that fansubbers should continue distributing titles even after the DVDs have been released in North America. He concluded,

> I would like to stress that Anime Junkies' stance can be summed up to this. We do not wish to harm the industry in America. We are a group of loyal

> and dedicated anime fans that annually put thousands of dollars into the industry straight from our own pockets. We only wish to help the growth of anime in America and around the world. I would also like to illuminate the fact that Anime Junkies regularly complies with requests from license holders to stop all distribution.[21]

To me, this gives the clearest portrait of why they view their piracy as pro-industry or at least pro–anime culture. They aim to balance their commitment to "do no harm to the industry" with a desire to have the hard work that they had already done appreciated. This logic makes sense only if we calculate the value of community admiration as part of the payoff for fansub groups.

## WHAT DO ANIME STUDIOS THINK ABOUT FANSUBS?

Judging from postings in online discussion forums, some fans believe that fansubbers' work is tacitly approved by anime companies, but few anime distributors actually voice that opinion. One American businessperson I spoke to, the founder of a company that licenses and sells anime and manga in the United States, said she viewed fansubbers as "legit" if they do in fact stop distributing work once it is licensed.[22] Notably, however, she asked that her name and the name of her company not be used, because she feared her opinion might sour her relationship with Japanese distributors. In March 2005, I met with several anime producers in Tokyo, and I asked each about whether they were concerned about fansubbing. Kubo Masakazu, a producer of the *Pokémon* movie series, was unequivocal: "[Fansubbers] think they are supporting anime but not a penny goes to the creators. It's stealing."[23] Perhaps the most interesting response, however, came from Suzuki Toshio, the producer at Studio Ghibli, which is director Miyazaki Hayao's famed studio. Twice I asked him his opinion of fansubbers, but both times he veered off and answered another question. When I asked a third time, "But do you think fansubbing is good or bad?" He looked me directly in the eye, and smiled, and offered only silence, until we moved on. This captures the ways that producers themselves recognize their own betwixt-and-between world, where they depend on their fans and know full well that fans cannot be fully controlled, but they can be angered. For Suzuki, the best response was no response.

Not all the studios have responded with silence, however, and more and more cease-and-desist letters have been sent to fansub groups. The general

consensus among fans was that if a company asks, then the Web sites and fansub groups should respect their wishes, which in turn offers proof that a market-based logic is seen as trumping fan desires. It is this attitude of anime fans that offers such a sharp contrast to my research on music downloading among U.S. college students, who, when faced with arguments about the unfairness of downloading music for free, usually respond by pointing to the unfairness of the recording industry.[24]

## CONCLUSION

A fundamental question is whether the sharing of media online ultimately helps or hurts the market for music, television, and film. I would argue that in many ways the debate about the effects of file sharing has been far too narrowly defined, and that is why I aim to suggest some of the cultural dynamics that may be poorly captured by market models of behavior. Some empirical analyses have attempted to assess the effect of peer-to-peer file sharing with regard to music sales. Business school scholars Felix Oberholzer-Gee and Koleman Strumpf argue that file sharing has a statistically insignificant effect on record sales.[25] Economist Stan Leibowitz is among those who dispute their findings, but a range of other papers support the idea that file sharing may not be as damaging as the entertainment industry claims.[26] Indeed, a recent study funded by the Canadian government found that downloads have a positive impact on sales.[27] Needless to say, the entertainment industry takes a dim view of arguments showing the potential value of unauthorized file sharing. The United States Congress, in the fall of 2007, was even considering legislation to punish colleges and universities by placing limits on financing for students if the schools don't make sufficient efforts to combat peer-to-peer media file sharing.[28] Yet the dynamics of popularity and media success are so complex and so commonly hinge on small historical events and unpredictable mechanisms of buzz and feedback that I believe the market question cannot be resolved by measuring sales. How can we determine when an unauthorized download is a lost sale?

Dark energy can help us see sides of contemporary media that are often obscured. I see fansubbing as evidence that much of what drives fans' interest in "cool Japan" arises from social dynamics that cannot be translated into economic value. Fansubbers also provide an intriguing example of how amateur cultural mediators add value to anime. The concept of dark energy enables us to think more broadly about the feedback loops that invigorate

popular culture before and after point-of-sale moments; it is "dark" because it is a collective energy disguised by the rhetoric of "piracy" and "commodification," which emphasize the moment of payment, or lack thereof, rather than the broader networks of flow. In this regard, online sharing of anime points to a somewhat new configuration of practices and technologies of copying and exchange, and in turn offers a way of seeing how fans are an integral part of what may become an emerging consensus on the appropriate boundaries of commodification and legitimate sharing. Moreover, fansubbers operate in an imagined space between Japan and the United States, where they desire to be a bridge between languages and cultures. It is this in-between tension, and the desire to both expand fandom and to give back to the anime industry, that feeds the dark energy of anime fansubbers. By mapping worlds such as these, it seems to me that we can come to a deeper understanding of how media, cultural economies, and transnational fandom are evolving.

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PATRICK W. GALBRAITH

# Akihabara: Conditioning a Public "Otaku" Image

## OTAKU IN AKIHABARA

This article will present an ethnographic snapshot of changes in Akihabara, Tokyo's "Electric Town" shopping district, to problematize the economic, social, and political conditioning of the *otaku* image. Otaku, often defined as devoted fans of anime, manga, videogames, and technology, are widely reported to gather in Akihabara. At the same time, a national survey conducted in 2007 placed Akihabara as the tenth most popular destination in Japan for foreign visitors, more desirable than Tokyo Disneyland.[1] At once geek and global, Akihabara makes explicit certain tensions in the otaku image. In the 1980s, otaku were described as social rejects, those who failed to conform, communicate with others, and connect consumption and play to productive roles at home, school, and work.[2] Sharon Kinsella points out that in the 1990s otaku came to symbolize for media commentators the downfall of Japanese society itself.[3] However, I argue that this negative discourse changed in the 2000s, and this can be observed in Akihabara. This more positive media paradigm is captured in such expressions as "otaku boom" (*otaku būmu*) and "Akihabara boom" (*Akiba būmu*). I am not saying that there has

A NATIONAL SURVEY CONDUCTED IN 2007 PLACED AKIHABARA AS THE TENTH MOST POPULAR DESTINATION IN JAPAN FOR FOREIGN VISITORS, MORE DESIRABLE THAN TOKYO DISNEYLAND.

been a fundamental transformation of "otaku," which would presume the existence of a unified otaku subject, group, or culture. I follow Kam Thiam Huat in asserting that otaku is a label, which fluctuates along with social conditions and "common sense."[4] My objective is to trace changes in the otaku image through changes in a place associated with them, Akihabara, and suggest why this has occurred. This is not a history of otaku but a history of perceptions of otaku and presentations of them, primarily in the mass media. Whether true or not, images of otaku in the mass media certainly influence popular understandings; they set the parameters for discussion. In the 2000s, otaku were recognized as ultraconsumers and a creative force in the "contents industry," and were incorporated into the "cool Japan" brand.[5] This awkward transition was recorded by the ubiquitous cameras of otaku, journalists, and tourists converging on Akihabara. As Thomas LaMarre has argued, controlling otaku movement is no easy task,[6] and the solution as I have seen it in Akihabara has been to simultaneously naturalize their image and marginalize their physical presence.[7] The otaku image operates in increasingly contradictory ways. Variety shows featuring "otaku idols" (*otadoru*)[8] appear next to reports of crimes perpetrated by otaku. The bipolar otaku image is reflected in the bifurcated urban landscape of Akihabara (Figure 1), divided into glassy showcase buildings and hidden otaku warrens.

I will use the bounded space of Akihabara as a physical signifier to trace the evolution of the otaku image in the popular, public, and political imagination. My argument is inspired by Morikawa Kaichirō's approach to Akihabara, namely that a high density of otaku personalities and a lack of socializing forces allowed private desires to manifest in public space.[9] In essence, Akihabara is an otaku's room blown up to city scale, sexy anime-girl posters and all. Morikawa characterizes Akihabara as different from shopping destinations such as Shinjuku, planned by bureaucrats in the 1960s and developed by large corporations in the 1970s, and Shibuya, developed by railway companies and department stores in the 1970s. In contrast, fragmentary land ownership in Akihabara resisted tract development and led to an "absence of such power."[10] Morikawa makes a compelling argument for the rise of otaku subculture in Akihabara in the recessionary 1990s (discussed below). However, the presence of power, symbolized by large-scale development, has become an unavoidable reality since his publication in 2003. Morikawa is himself

aware of this and addresses it in a December 2008 updated paperback edition of his work.[11] He details the impact of political planning and media exposés opening the otaku room, and how the refuge of otaku became a "dangerous place" that repelled them.[12] That is, Akihabara became a place to be seen, and so the real otaku left and were replaced by youth performing "otaku-ness" for the cameras. However, I would suggest that otaku, regardless of their presumed "authenticity," were reshaped rather than repelled by the opening of Akihabara. Rather than posit the end of the otaku era in Akihabara, I suggest an opening of the otaku image to contested meanings, which are performed on the media stage, or in the symbolic space, of Akihabara. A convergence of discursive forces economic and political, cultural and social, domestic and foreign conditioned a "cool" otaku image in Akihabara, which reframed and restricted the possibilities for people gathering there.

My primary focus for this article is economic and global influences on the rise of otaku and Akihabara. By isolating and correlating these two loci of power, I will demonstrate the often schizophrenic stance toward otaku in Japan. Even as otaku feed a global chain of innovation in commercial products, consumption patterns, and cultural practices, they are treated as disruptive



**FIGURE 1.** A view of Akihabara's main thoroughfare, Chūō Street, with electronics and hobby shops in the forefront and the Redevelopment Area in the background. Photograph by Patrick W. Galbraith.

and pushed out of sight in Akihabara to make way for official platforms to promote Japanese cool. My account draws on five years (2004–2009) of participant observation in Akihabara. As part of my research, I established a nonprofit tour[13] in the area to forge bonds with local storeowners and leaders and to collect regular survey data on perceptions of otaku and Akihabara. As the tour grew in popularity, I gained access to members of the media, business, and political worlds, who helped to expand my understanding of material relations in Akihabara. Walking the streets dressed as an anime character and leading a group of international tourists, I also experienced bodily the tension of being a public otaku, in turn criticized as a nuisance and praised as a cultural ambassador.

A CONVERGENCE OF DISCURSIVE FORCES ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL, DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN CONDITIONED A "COOL" OTAKU IMAGE IN AKIHABARA, WHICH REFRAMED AND RESTRICTED THE POSSIBILITIES FOR PEOPLE GATHERING THERE.

## THE ECONOMY OF AKIHABARA AND OTAKU

The most important frame and basis for the rise of Akihabara and otaku is economy. According to the official city Web site,[14] in the early years of the Allied Occupation of Japan, the area from Akihabara to Ueno was a sprawling black market, especially noted for rare and high-quality electronic parts. The close proximity of what would become Tokyo Denki University meant skilled students in the area were working part time constructing radios for information-hungry Japanese. In 1949, General Headquarters ordered the street stalls move to the railroad tracks to make way for roads. The convenience of shopping in a dense market near the station made Akihabara the seat of the electronics and household-appliance boom from the late 1950s into the 1960s. The so-called "Three Sacred Treasures" (*sanshu no jingi*) of the day were the television, the washing machine, and the refrigerator. In 1958, 7.8 percent of households had a TV, 20.2 percent a washer, and 2.8 percent a refrigerator, but by 1966 these numbers reached 95 percent, 78.1 percent, and 68.7 percent, respectively. The imperial marriage in 1959, the Apollo Space Program from 1961, and the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 made television a necessity. Akihabara had about 10 percent of the national market at the time, making the area a prosperous destination for families buying into the "electronics lifestyle" (*kaden seikatsu*). Akihabara had its fair share of "proto-otaku," but they were not yet identified as such and were still a minority.[15]

The origin of otaku is most often placed after this, in the 1970s. By this time, the tumultuous years of economic recovery and social upheaval were over and consumer pleasure was on the rise. This was supported by a renewed fervor in mass marketing. This engendered a change so drastic that Yoshimi Shun'ya divides the history of postwar Japan into before and after the 1970s.[16] This "post-postwar society" was one of saturation, where everything was commoditized and mediatized. Ōtsuka Eiji explains how young Japanese, perhaps all of Japan, became suspended in consumptive pleasure suspended from productive functions: "Our existence consists solely on the distribution and consumption of 'things' . . . with which we play. . . . These 'things' are continually converted into signs without substance, signs such as information."[17] Thus was born the "pure consumer" disconnected from political or social concerns and shut away in a private "pleasure room."[18]

MARKET STRATEGIES PROVIDED MATERIALS THAT MADE POSSIBLE MYRIAD FORMS OF OTAKU ACTIVITY, SOME OF WHICH WOULD LATER ENGENDER SERIOUS SOCIAL ANXIETY.

The rise of otaku, at least anime otaku, seems a related trend. Pop artist Murakami Takashi suggests that after student protests failed to change the nature of U.S.–Japan postwar relations, the oil shock slowed economic growth, and environmental disasters came to light, social engagement dropped off and disenfranchised youth started seeking alternatives in fantasy.[19] As Morikawa phrases it, hope for the bright future of science and technology was channeled into science fiction.[20] This is demonstrated by the emergence of sophisticated narrative anime such as *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974–75, *Uchū senkan yamato*) and *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979–80, *Kidō senshi gandamu*). Specialty magazines such as *Animage* (from 1978) appeared, contributing to a knowledge community around anime. We begin to observe the attention to detail, or what Volker Grassmuck calls "information fetishism."[21] Okada Toshio says otaku are characterized by an "advanced visual sense" (*shinka shita shikaku*) and "highly efficient referential ability" (*kōseinō no refarensu nōryoku*), which developed in sustained interaction with media and technology.[22] *The Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* (*Chōjikū yōsai makurosu*), a TV anime created by and for anime fans in 1982, marked the first time the word *otaku* was used in the mass media,[23] likely the vernacular of its creators slipping through.[24] In the 1980s, VCRs became more common, allowing fans to record, collect, share, and study anime, accelerating and expanding knowledge production.

Further, the growth of this "otaku" culture was encouraged for economic reasons. Faced with a declining population of children, anime creators, some

of who were fans themselves, began targeting the adult audience for anime. They knew the power of anime fans, of adults with greater disposable income. Slow-moving *Gundam* was a failure as a "super robot" series for children, and its original TV run was canceled due to poor toy sales, but otaku made it a sensation with fanatic support for the more realistic robot designs, which were made available as scaled plastic models. Fans wrote encyclopedias, director Tomino Yoshiyuki declared a new age of anime in a speech in 1981, and a certain shower scene inspired others to experiment with erotic animation. Not only were anime expression and fan activities rapidly expanding but genres and viewer demographics were collapsing into one another. For example, *Magical Princess Minky Momo* (1982, *Mahō no purinsesu minkī momo*) is a story targeting little girls but featuring sexy character designs for adult men, the type of "big friends" (*ōkī otomodachi*) that have made magical-girl shows an enduring and profitable genre. The market logic is clear—increase sales—but the result was to put adult men and young girls into close, often uncomfortably close, proximity. "*Rorikon*" (Lolita Complex), or an attraction to young female characters, owes much to this. While by no means attempting to justify such desires, I would point out that market strategies provided materials that made possible myriad forms of otaku activity, some of which would later engender serious social anxiety.

Otaku began gathering in Akihabara around technology, namely VCRs, videogame consoles, and computers. As stores in the suburbs and at commuter stations began dealing in home appliances and electronics, Akihabara shifted to personal computers.[25] In 1976, NEC launched its TK-80 microcomputer assembly kit, and opened a Bit-INN Service Center in Akihabara. The area became a haunt for computer specialists and hobbyists. Morikawa stresses that these tended to be young men with otaku tastes, who found in Akihabara a haven among like-minded individuals and away from the gaze of women.[26] Akihabara, then, was a "pure consumer" space, an extension of the private (disconnected) "pleasure room" into public space. This is clear from the fact that Messe Sanoh began selling erotic games for the PC in 1987. In 1994, they started carrying *dōjinshi,* which are materials published outside official channels and are often pornographic representations of anime characters. That same year, Toranoana opened a store in Akihabara devoted to *dōjinshi.* In the 1990s, the Japanese economy crashed; land prices plummeted in Akihabara, making room for more niche offerings. Regular reruns of the hit anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–96, *Shinseiki evangerion*) in the late 1990s expanded the ranks of otaku. The series overlapped with a boom in figurines of anime characters and the spread of the Internet, making otaku

consumption and community more conspicuous. By Morikawa's estimation, a model kit before *Evangelion* sold maybe three thousand pieces, but figures of Ayanami Rei from *Evangelion* could sell ten times that amount.[27] Kaiyōdō moved its showroom from Shibuya to Akihabara in 1997 and sparked a mass immigration of competitors and otaku.[28] Morikawa shows that the Radio Kaikan, Akihabara's first high-rise building erected in 1962, symbolically became a monolith of otaku consumption in the 1990s.[29] Akihabara prospered despite the economic recession because of otaku hobby consumption.[30] At the same time, the image of otaku in the mass media was decidedly negative.

## MEDIA NEGATIVITY TOWARD OTAKU

Although otaku were in many ways a predictable outcome of Japanese "information consumption society" (*jōhō shōhi shakai*) since the 1970s, media discrimination against them began early. In 1983, Nakamori Akio penned the article "'Otaku' Research" about unsocialized misfits at fan conventions.[31] However, the article appeared in *Manga burikko,* a minor magazine catering to *rorikon* fans, and so the word *otaku* was likely known only in certain circles. Readers of *Manga burikko,* who were beginning to imagine a shared identity in this and other specialty magazines, reacted fiercely against Nakamori's stereotypes of anime and manga fans. The debate dragged on until 1984, but most people were not using *otaku* (at least to refer to themselves).[32] It was, however, circulating in the media discourse, as demonstrated by its appearance in a Recruit survey on youth personality in 1985. In 1989, the media went into a frenzy over the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu, who molested and murdered four girls between the ages of four and seven. In his room, investigators discovered 5,763 videotapes of recorded TV programs, anime, horror movies, and pornography, including some examples of *rorikon.* There was already a growing anxiety about "virtual reality" and media effects, emblazoned by Itō Seikō's *No Life King* (1988), and people demanded an explanation for the heinous crimes. The mass media picked up on a buzzword to decry the "otaku generation."[33] Because the word was largely unknown up to this point—Miyazaki himself was not even aware of it[34]—this sociopath was for many Japanese the only image of otaku. Nakamori again weighed in with *The Generation of M: Miyazaki and Us,* and the innocuous word became taboo.[35] Kinsella argues that otaku came to represent in the media everything that was wrong with Japanese society in the 1990s.[36] Kam clarifies that otaku meant those who did not conform, could not communicate, failed to be men,

and lost touch with reality.[37] Much of the discourse on otaku in the 1990s emphasizes one or more of these points.

## EARLY TENSIONS IN AKIHABARA

Conflicting images of otaku collided in Akihabara in 1995. On the one hand, at a November sales event for Windows, promoters called Akihabara "the most advanced multimedia town."[38] Technology and otaku consumption and creativity were, in an oblique way, praised. Earlier that year, however, Aum Shinrikyō, a new religion and the most successful domestic terrorist group in Japanese history, was found to have a discount computer store in Akihabara called Mahapōsha. Their apocalyptic worldview was a pastiche of sci-fi technology and anime references, including *Space Battleship Yamato*.[39] This was evidence enough for many to deem Aum an "otaku" cult.[40] Both Akihabara and otaku suffered from the association. However, about six months after Aum released sarin gas on the Tokyo subway, an anime series displayed an eerily similar vision of apocalypse: *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. *Evangelion* resonated with the apathy and anxiety of the 1990s, and its popularity became a major factor in Akihabara's revival. The series signals the presence of two competing images of otaku: social dissenters and economic saviors. Eventually the latter prevailed. This had to do with growing otaku discourse among anime and manga fans, but also with the mounting economic and political significance of otaku.

## POLITICAL AND POPULAR MEDIATION OF OTAKU

Despite tension in the otaku image in Japan, it was flourishing overseas as a way to describe fans of the burgeoning supply of import anime and Japanese popular culture.[41] Frederik L. Schodt ties the spread of the word in the United States to sci-fi and anime conventions in the early 1990s.[42] It spread like wildfire with AnimEigo's localization of *Otaku no Video* (*Otaku no bideo*) in 1993. That year, the word appeared on the cover of the premiere issue of *Wired* magazine. In 1994, the annual convention Otakon was formed, referencing otaku in its very name. Awareness of the word spread with William Gibson's 1996 novel *Idoru*. In stark contrast, in Japan, NHK and Asahi Shimbun deemed otaku a discriminatory word and banned it; Okada Toshio, who pioneered the study of otaku (*otakugaku*) after the Miyazaki incident and

became a public otaku persona, was cautioned against saying the word during TV appearances.[43] Nonetheless, outside Japan, to be otaku was to be part of a new cultural movement.

Not only was the international profile of Japanese popular culture rising, but it was also increasingly tied to otaku. Between 2001 and 2002, Murakami Takashi's "Superflat" art exhibition toured the United States, and the word *otaku* was disseminated in reviews of the show, which ran in major media outlets. In 2004, Morikawa organized "OTAKU: persona = space = city" at the Ninth International Architecture Exhibit of the Venice Biennale. It was a demonstration of his theory of the personification of urban space, which centers on Akihabara. Thus, with sponsorship from the Japan Foundation, the representative Japanese space was a miniature Akihabara filled with otaku. Murakami's "Little Boy" exhibition in 2005 was more explicitly about otaku, and the catalogue even featured a dialogue between Okada and Morikawa; this was sponsored by the Japan Society. At the same time, the Nomura Research Institute estimated that 1.72 million otaku in Japan spent an annual $3.5 billion on their hobbies,[44] adding a positive spin to the practices of "enthusiastic consumers." Japanese pop culture was increasingly associated with otaku culture, and otaku culture with Akihabara. Akihabara became the symbolic stage upon which to reclaim this force in consumption and creativity, and it hosted high profile events referencing otaku.[45]

Akihabara also began to attract attention from tourists. The area had the custom of closing Chūō Street, its main traffic artery, on the weekends to create a "pedestrian paradise" (*hokōsha tengoku*). Amateur singing idols, cosplayers (those who dress as anime or game characters), and colorful otaku personalities were drawn to increased media and popular interest in the mid-2000s. The lively street culture was mentioned in a deluge of news reports, TV programs, and magazine articles in Japan, which made their way overseas. In travel guides, including *Lonely Planet*, Akihabara appeared to be a bohemian paradise for otaku, the site where otaku culture had reached critical mass and exploded to an unprecedented scale and level of activity. It had become the world's single largest concentration of stores dealing anime, manga, videogames, figures, and so on. While some criticized the inflated position of Akihabara and the subsequently skewed image of otaku, the area was imagined as the symbolic center of the transnational otaku movement.

The pinnacle of the new otaku image in the mass media was Fuji TV's *Densha otoko* (2005, *Train Man*), a prime-time love/comedy/drama starring an otaku character and often shot on location in Akihabara. *Densha otoko* tells how a virginal otaku saves a middle-aged, fashionable career woman from

being molested by a drunk on the train, and then, with advice from otaku community site 2channel, learns to court her. The protagonist learns how to dress, date, and buy gifts, becoming a new model of the consuming male.[46] Far from the sociopathic otaku of the 1990s, he is a warmhearted, repressed guy looking to "graduate" (*sotsugyōsuru*) from the otaku lifestyle; his consumption had to be redirected from personal pleasure to productive social relationships. While many otaku condemned the work as fictitious and didactic ("otaku grow up!"),[47] it met a positive reception in the mainstream. The last episode of the TV series was watched by 25.5 percent of the national audience.[48] People seemed ready to reconsider otaku. In fact, "girl falls for an otaku" reads like a parable of Japan coming to love its outcast sons, and the romance unfolds on the streets of Akihabara.

"GIRL FALLS FOR AN OTAKU" READS LIKE A PARABLE OF JAPAN COMING TO LOVE ITS OUTCAST SONS, AND THE ROMANCE UNFOLDS ON THE STREETS OF AKIHABARA.

The show opened the floodgates for increased mediation of and tourism in Akihabara.[49] At the time, Akihabara had no filming restrictions, meaning location costs were minimal and TV and film producers could use the streets as a discount alternative. The door to the metaphoric otaku room was ripped open and the occupants captured on candid camera. TV crews scoured Akihabara looking for otaku to stage as props or put on variety shows, and, for a short time, street performers, cosplayers, and otaku became celebrities.[50] For example, I encountered a young male construction worker who called himself "Haruhi," because he wore the girl's school uniform from the anime *The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi* (2006, *Suzumiya Haruhi no yūutsu*). "Cross-play," or cross-dressing cosplay, was becoming popular on the streets at the time. As colorful as he was, Haruhi was often approached by the media. Emboldened by his exposure, Haruhi and some fifty costumed accomplices took over the pedestrian paradise in summer 2007 to perform a street dance, which became an international sensation (or at least a meme) on online video sharing sites.[51] This behavior predictably resulted in increased police presence to curb public nuisance. Public questioning and "random" bag searches discouraged many otaku from coming to Akihabara. Others simply felt alienated by all the "non-otaku" impinging on their privacy. Later that year, an NHK survey[52] showed only 30 percent of those in Akihabara were still pursing otaku hobbies, the same number as Japanese tourists coming to the neighborhood to observe otaku.

At the same time, otaku were bluntly and unapologetically being tied to the Japanese brand, as in Japan Travel Bureau's book, *Cool Japan: Otaku*

*Japan Guide* in 2008. The Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) mobilized to tap otaku tourism. JNTO's English-language Web site advertised "otaku tours" of the "Otaku Mecca"—Akihabara.[53] Asō Tarō, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, began visiting Akihabara to strategically tout the global potency of Japan's pop culture and its otaku.[54] He went so far as to tell a crowd at a rally in Akihabara, "Thanks to otaku, Japanese culture, so-called subculture, has undoubtedly been spread throughout the world."[55] What is stunning is that Asō, who was running for prime minister, thought his association with otaku and Akihabara would *bolster* his public image. By 2007, a JNTO survey revealed that as many as 8.6 percent of foreign visitors to Japan set foot in Akihabara, 69 percent for the first time.[56] Earlier in the year, NHK had estimated 5 percent of visitors to Akihabara were from overseas. The foreign fascination with otaku and Akihabara was such that it almost appeared as parody in manga *Moe USA* in 2007 (Figure 2). In Akihabara, the otaku image was increasingly operating independently of those identified as "otaku" and in the interests of those identifying otaku.

## IMPACT OF IMAGE CHANGE ON AKIHABARA

In the 2000s, Akihabara was in the midst of pervasive rescripting and redevelopment in line with neoliberal "city making" (*machizukuri*) initiatives. Broadly, the plans for Akihabara are part of mayor Ishihara Shintarō's vision of cleaning up the downtown (*shitamachi*) and presenting Tokyo as an advanced global city. Akihabara was to be the "Silicon Valley of Japan." Digital/creative contents were valued at some 11 trillion yen a year in 2000, and a 2003 report by the Japanese government shows that 742 software developers, Internet ventures, and data processing companies were located within one kilometer of the Akihabara train station.[57] The Tokyo Metropolitan Government invested 100 billion yen in IT development projects in the same area. Otaku were implicated in the policy, as it was suggested that they were the force that kept Japan's digital/creative contents competitive.[58] The "Redevelopment Area" (*saikaihatsu chi'iki*) subsequently superimposed on Akihabara follows a line drawn through its middle along Chūō Street, which has become a convenient and highly visible dividing line between Akihabara as private otaku space and public political space.

In 2005, the Redevelopment Area welcomed what was Japan's largest Yodobashi, an electronics box store, and the Tsukuba Express Line to nearby Ibaraki Prefecture, a "baby basket" with many larger-than-average middle-


AKIBA!!!
("AKIBA" IS SLANG FOR "AKIHABARA," THE AREA OF TOKYO WHERE OTAKU HANG OUT.)
HE'S WEARING AN ANIME T-SHIRT
HE'S GOT A MANGA SHOPPING BAG
AND HE HAS A DESIGNER BACKPACK!
I CAN'T BELIEVE MY EYES!
IT'S A REAL JAPANESE OTAKU!!!
HE'S SOOOO COOL!
MR. OTAKU, CAN WE TAKE YOUR PICTURE?
DO YOU THINK HE'S SINGLE?
NA... NA... NANI?!

**FIGURES 2.** Excerpt from the manga *Moe USA*, volume 1. In the image, drawn by a Japanese artist, two American girls have arrived in Akihabara, and their overreaction appears as a caricature of international interest in the area. The same is true of their encounter with a "real Japanese otaku." Copyright Japanime Co. Ltd. and Atsuhisa Okura.

class families and a first-rate technological research university.[59] As a commuter hub and tourist destination, Akihabara drew a diverse crowd and became less dependent on otaku. As Kobayashi Takaya, a councilman from Chiyōda Ward, where Akihabara is located, told me in January 2008: "The future lies with the construction of megabuildings and a contents industry. Akihabara has a bright future after otaku." The redevelopment of Akihabara culminated in three new high-rise buildings erected between 2005 and 2007, including the UDX Building, an "urban development" project by telecommunications conglomerate NTT. Developers and entrepreneurs following the buzz to Akihabara pushed land prices up 20.4 percent between 2006 and 2007.[60] Among the new structures was a luxury office complex right on Chūō Street—including the same ground where Aum Shinrikyō once had their computer store. On this street corner, Akihabara was physically reconstructed even as the "otaku" who congregated here were reimagined.

## IMPACT OF IMAGE CHANGE ON OTAKU

I have established a shift in the otaku image as encountered in Akihabara, a shift from antisocial subculture to components of a branded Japanese pop culture. I now turn to present data on the concrete effects this had on otaku in the streets. The speed of the image change was such that otaku could not keep up. The first time most Japanese saw the "otaku room" was in news coverage of the Miyazaki incident, an infamous image of a dark, dirty space of disturbing obsession. A decade later, families were bringing their kids to play in the city-scale otaku room of Akihabara. This predictably resulted in anxiety, for example over "junior idols" and "virtual child pornography" (often overlapping with the somewhat dated "*rorikon*"), which were an open part of Akihabara, much to the chagrin of cool Japan advocates. Kobayashi said the some 5,000 local residents and shop owners of Akihabara regularly complain of otaku obscenity, shoplifting, loitering, disturbances, littering, and so on. He makes a distinction between "weird otaku" performers and "normal otaku" consumers, and recognizes the need to control the former and support the latter.[61] This was the background of police patrols and bag searches (looking for stolen or dangerous objects) in 2007 and 2008.

Performing and policing otaku, the two sides of the image campaign in Akihabara, were brought into stunning opposition by two events during the pedestrian paradise in 2008. The first was the arrest of an idol, the second a mass slaying. The former involved Sawamoto Asuka, a self-proclaimed "sexy

idol" who wore an incredibly short skirt, climbed railings, and lifted her leg for "low-angle photographers." This flashing became an issue when local citizens complained of indecency and her fans grew into a mob that followed her like the Pied Piper. Sawamoto was arrested on April 25, 2008, in what many otaku suspected was a display for the media.[62] TV programs such as *Miyaneya* then suggested all of the street performers, and cosplayers, in Akihabara were dressed too provocatively. Street idols (*rojō aidoru*) were already under heavy fire for loud performances that encourage rowdy fans to go into fits of wild (semi-)synchronized motion called the "otaku art" (*otagei*). The professed lawlessness led to more draconian police action, including enforcing restrictions on public performances in Chiyōda Ward.[63]

Ironically, on May 4, 2008, just over a week after Sawamoto's arrest and the advent of marches against street idols and fans (Figure 3), the UDX Building hosted an indoor Akiba Otaku Festival; otaku were encouraged to attend but explicitly told not to dance spastically or dress offensively, which included cross-playing. Characters such as Haruhi were banned, where only a year before they had been in the spotlight. It should be noted here that the activities of so-called "weird otaku" were at least in part facilitated by the




**FIGURE 3.** Local business owners and residents march against street performances and "weird otaku" in Akihabara. Photograph by Patrick W. Galbraith.

media. Otaku were an important part of Akihabara's position in the global imagination, a status perpetuated by media images; those on the street, who performed for the camera, could not be allowed to devalue the otaku image. The logic of the Akiba Otaku Festival was domestification: otaku animals corralled and disciplined (Figure 4). Akihabara was not a theme park so much as a zoo, as there was a danger to the beasts on exhibit, which could not be allowed to run wild.




**FIGURE 4.** A flyer for the Akiba Otaku Festival, which took place on the heels of the arrest of a street performer. Strict regulation of participants was a harbinger of larger changes afoot in the area.

THE LOGIC OF THE AKIBA OTAKU FESTIVAL WAS DOMESTIFICATION: OTAKU ANIMALS CORRALLED AND DISCIPLINED.

The threshold after which otaku performances were entirely discouraged came a month later with the Akihabara massacre (*Akihabara tōrima jiken*), one of the worst mass murders in the history of postwar Japan. On June 8, Katō Tomohiro, a twenty-five-year-old dispatch worker stationed in a factory in Shizuoka, rented a truck and came to Akihabara for the pedestrian paradise. He then proceeded to run down several people and rampage across Chūō Street with a knife, killing seven and injuring ten. When it was revealed that he played games, posted 3,000 messages on a cell-phone site, and professed to love Akihabara, many took to calling Katō an otaku.[64] Just over a week after the tragedy, Miyazaki Tsutomu's execution was abruptly carried out, and otaku were back in the news in the worst way. On June 26, 2008, police arrested a man in possession of a knife in Akihabara. Police went after the usual suspects, "armed otaku" (*busō otaku*), who were carrying weapons (often replicas) to scare off would-be predators engaging in "otaku hunting" (*otakugari*), or mugging weak hobby shoppers.[65] The Chiyōda Ward Council, on chairman Ishikawa Masami's order, closed the pedestrian paradise on June 12, 2008, ending its thirty-five-year history.[66]

In the following year, tourists from Japan and abroad all had the same question: "If this is Akihabara, where are the otaku?"[67] Indeed, while JNTO explicitly targeted Korea, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, the United States, and the United Kingdom for cool Japan tourism, Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States were the three groups most disappointed after visiting Akihabara.[68] In 2007, Akihabara was the fifteenth most recommended place but the eighth most disappointing for visitors.[69] Locals are becoming aware of this, giving impetus to revival groups such as *Akiba-kai*, which, with the help of leaders such as Kobayashi, organized the World's Akihabara Festival. However, the inaugural event in March 2009 only drew a couple hundred people, a handful of whom were foreign, and fewer still of those identified as otaku in years past.

## OTAKU OUT OF AKIHABARA

"Liberate Akihabara." United under this simple banner, an unprecedented five hundred men and women took to the streets of Akihabara on June 29, 2007, to protest changes in the area. The organizer, Shū-chan, spoke of increased police presence and the loss of a special place where all people,

especially those unwelcome elsewhere, could belong. His demonstration was completely ignored by the mainstream media.[70] The skeptical dismissed it as another performance by attention seekers. In the end, like so many otaku in Akihabara, nothing remains of Shū-chan but an image (Figure 5).

While cool otaku never existed in Japan, power politics conditioned that subject in Akihabara. There is significant discord between the otaku imagined along with booming anime consumption in Japan and abroad and the otaku image born of decades of negative press and social anxiety. Whether it is gentrification or slumification, Akihabara is changing, and otaku have less room to play there. This is in inverse proportion to the greater play they are getting in the discourse on cool Japanese popular culture. Polarized images of otaku, Miyazaki Tsutomu and Densha Otoko, exist side by side, and neither negative or positive extremes represent most people on the streets of Akihabara. However, media stereotypes are widely distributed and form expectations of "otaku." These expectations are not met, leading tourists to ask, "If this is Akihabara, where are the otaku?" Akihabara is a showcase where everyone and no one is on display, the symbolic and ultimately empty center of otaku culture.[71]




**FIGURE 5.** Hundreds rally in Akihabara, some dressed as cartoon characters and others as political radicals. A wide range of young Japanese formed a coalition to "liberate" the area from those who would change it. Photograph by Adrian A. Lozano.

## Notes

1. JNTO, *JNTO hōnichi gaikyaku jittai chōsa 2006–2007: Hōmonchi chōsa hen* (JNTO survey of foreign visitors to Japan 2006–2007: Places visited) (Tokyo: International Tourism Center of Japan, 2008).

2. Kam Thiam Huat, "The Common Sense That Makes the 'Otaku': Rules for Consuming Popular Culture in Contemporary Japan," M.A. thesis submitted to the National University of Singapore, 2008, 8-9.

3. Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Oxon, U.K.: Routledge, 2000), 102–38.

4. Kam, "The Common Sense That Makes the 'Otaku.'"

5. See Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2002, 44–54.

6. Thomas LaMarre, "*Otaku* Movement," in *Japan after Japan,* eds. Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian, 358–94 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

7. Attempts to control and sanitize the streets of Tokyo are as old as Japan's modern history itself. During the Meiji Period, street performances (*daidōgei*) were common in the downtown around Asakusa and Shitaya Akiba no hara, the "amusement parks of the lower classes." This came to an abrupt end in autumn 1891, when police closed street stalls (*hiraki*) and disbanded unlicensed entertainment to curb "corruption of public morals." Hyōdō and Smith cynically point out, however, that the government then attempted to reclaim stylish forms of plebian entertainment such as *naniwabushi* as a "national voice." For more, see Hyōdō Hiromi and Henry Smith, "Singing Tales of the Gishi," *Monumenta Nipponica* 61, no. 4 (2006): 459–508.

8. For example, Nakagawa Shōko. Her fame is part of a broader naturalization of the otaku identity. Otaku have become such a mainstream phenomenon that experts say they are no longer a subculture. For more, see Okada Toshio, *Otaku wa sudeni shinde iru* (You are already dead) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2008).

9. Morikawa Kaichirō, *Shuto no tanjō: Moeru toshi Akihabara* (Learning from Akihabara: The birth of a personapolis) (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 2003).

10. Ibid., 14.

11. Morikawa Kaichirō, *Shuto no tanjō: Moeru toshi Akihabara* (Learning from Akihabara: The birth of a personapolis) (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 2008).

12. Ibid., 268–69.

13. http://www.otaku2.com/articleView.php?item=16.

14. http://www.akiba.or.jp/history/. All information in the following paragraph, unless otherwise indicated, is a summary the history published here.

15. Patrick W. Galbraith, *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An Insider's Guide to the Subculture of Cool Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2009).

16. Yoshimi Shun'ya, *Posuto sengo shakai* (Post-postwar society) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2009).

17. Ōtsuka Eiji, *Shōjo minzokugaku* (Little girl folklore studies) (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1989), 18.

18. Matsui Midori, "Beyond the Pleasure Room to a Chaotic Street: Transformations

of Cute Subculture in the Art of the Japanese Nineties," in *Little Boy*, ed. Murakami Takashi, 208-239 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005).

19. Murakami Takashi, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 119, 193.

20. Morikawa Kaichirō, *OTAKU: persona = space = city* (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 2004), 22.

21. Volker Grassmuck, "'I'm alone, but not lonely': Japanese Otaku-Kids Colonize the Realm of Information and Media," 1990, 9. Available online at http://www.cjas.org/~leng/otaku-e.htm.

22. Okada Toshio, *Otakugaku nyūmon* (Introduction to otakuology) (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 1996), 10, 28.

23. Patrick Macias and Machiyama Tomohiro, *Cruising the Anime City: An Otaku Guide to Neo Tokyo* (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 2004), 14.

24. This explanation of the etymology was stressed by magazine *EX taishū*; alternatives say creators from anime studio Gainax and sci-fi author Arai Motoko used the word and were emulated.

25. Morikawa, *Shuto no tanjō*, 42–44.

26. Galbraith, *Otaku Encyclopedia*, 14.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Morikawa, *Shuto no tanjō*, 51–56. At this time, anime set in or reifying Akihabara began to appear, for example *Cyber Team in Akihabara* (1998, *Akihabara dennō gumi*).

30. Kitabayashi Ken, *Otaku shijō no kenkyū* (Otaku market research) (Tokyo: Nomura Research Institute, 2005).

31. Nakamori Akio, "'*Otaku' no kenyū*" ("Otaku" research), *Manga burikko* (June 1983). For a translation, see http://neojaponisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/.

32. Okada, *Otakugaku*, 9. See also Ōtsuka Eiji, *"Otaku" no seishinshi* (The spiritual history of otaku) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004).

33. Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 128–29.

34. Ōsawa Masachi, *Fukanōsei no jidai* (The age of impossibility) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2008), 87.

35. While internal imaginings and understandings of otaku are not the focus of this paper, it should be noted that anime and manga fans were acutely aware of tensions in the otaku image. For example, Gainax's mock documentary, *Otaku no Video* (*Otaku no bideo*), released in 1991 right after the Miyazaki incident, juxtaposes animated segments of lovable otaku dreaming of world domination with live-action interviews with often frightening "real" otaku. The animation is a rough history of Gainax, and most of the interviews are with disguised members of the studio. Both images are media constructs and self-reflexive stereotypes.

36. Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 102–38.

37. Kam, "The Common Sense That Makes the 'Otaku.'"

38. http://www.akiba.or.jp/history/.

39. Yoshimi Shun'ya, *Riaritii toranjitto* (Reality transit) (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Shoten, 1996), 133–34.

40. For example, see Takekuma Kentarō, *Watashi to harumagedon: Otaku shūkyō*

*toshite no Oumu Shinrikyō* (Me and Armageddon: Aum Shinrikyō as an otaku cult) (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 1995).

41. Reports by the Japan External Trade Organization show that as much as 60 percent of the animation shown in the world is Japanese; the United States alone consumed $500 million worth of anime in 2003.

42. Galbraith, *The Otaku Encyclopedia,* 6.

43. Okada, *Otakugaku,* 8.

44. Kitabayashi, *Otaku shijō.*

45. Examples include Aki De Co's Moe and Akihabara Design international symposium, the Design Museum Akihabara and the Festival for Media Arts.

46. Alisa Freedman, "*Train Man* and the Gender Politics of Japanese '*Otaku*' Culture," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 20 (April 2009): http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue20/freedman.htm.

47. For example, *Akihabara@Deep.* See also Honda Tōru, *Denpa otoko* (Radiowave man) (Tokyo: Sansai Books, 2005).

48. Freedman, "*Train Man* and Gender Politics," 5.

49. So many visitors came to Akihabara in 2006 that the *Japan Times* reported its pay toilet, equipped with Internet access, had over 5,000 users a month. In 2007, the owner of Chichibu Denki told me he made $810,000 a year selling *oden* (a type of Japanese stew) in a can. He had started selling it warm from vending machines in the 1990s for otaku lining up for events, but it became a popular souvenir. Maid cafes, entertainment dining where young girls dress in costume and play games with customers, were featured in *Densha otoko,* after which locations increased tenfold (as estimated by *Maid Café Navi,* http://cafe.maid.sc/). The largest maid café in Akihabara, @home café, saw a 689 percent increase in media appearances (as estimated by their PR department http://www.cafe-athome.com/media/2005).

50. A Boss coffee commercial in 2008 provides a humorous parody of the scene: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_yMkBttqo0.

51. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okeq0uuldy0.

52. Conducted for the TV program *Cool Japan,* aired August 30, 2007.

53. http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/featuredarticles/animation/d01_akiha.html.

54. See, for example, his speech at Digital Hollywood University on April 28, 2006. http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0604-2.html.

55. Speech delivered on September 16, 2007. See highlights here: http://www.the-commons.jp/commons/main/news/2007/09/post_141.html.

56. France ranked first at 20.6 percent, followed by India at 20.4, and Russia at 19.2. America and England have been on the rise since 2006. Because of habitual repeat visitors, the average number of visits per person was 2.5. JNTO, *Hōmonchi chōsa hen.*

57. Kuniko Fujita and Richard Child Hill, "Innovative Tokyo," World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, 2005, 59, 30.

58. Ibid., 57.

59. In weekly magazines, these newcomers were called "*Tsukuba-kei,*" or Tsukuba style, as opposed to "*Akiba-kei,*" or Akihabara style, another way to say otaku.

60. Estimate based on government figures of the yearly value of the plot where the Manseibashi Police Station is located near the Electric Town Exit of the JR Akihabara

train station. Land values can be estimated at http://www.chikamap.jp/map/map.asp?plc=1310104400100001.

61. Author interview with Kobayashi Takaya, April 20, 2009.

62. See for example *Akiba Blog*: http://blog.livedoor.jp/geek/archives/50666053.html.

63. Chiyōda Ward has very conservative ordinances, as it is where the Imperial Palace, Diet building, and Yasakuni Shrine are located, as well as fifteen international embassies. Kanda Ward and Kōjimachi Ward were combined in 1947, making areas of central and downtown Tokyo subject to the same regulations.

64. For example, the headline of *Evening Fuji* newspaper on June 9 called him a "*rori-kon*" fan, and the article itself described him as an otaku. For an English language article that lucidly explains the negative otaku image in Akihabara, see http://www.japantoday.com/category/commentary/view/murder-in-lotus-land. It should be noted that Katō attacked Akihabara not because he was an otaku but because it was a media stage. Other reports have it that he did it to get revenge on the "Net people" who ignored him. Still others speculate that he might have been embittered at not being fiscally able to buy into the "otaku lifestyle" in Akihabara.

65. This dynamic was outlined in an *Asahi Shimbun* article on June 5, 2007. http://ime.nu/www.asahi.com/national/update/0605/TKY200706050286.html.

66. The Pedestrian Paradise was revived in summer 2010. There was, however, a constant reminder (often from otaku) not to take things too far or cause trouble for others. That is, there was an expectation of otaku being subject to public scrutiny and a movement to self-censor performances.

67. My own tour, by this point aligned with H.I.S. Experience Japan, fielded numerous such complaints. A few people even accused me of diverting them from the seedy underbelly of Akihabara or of intentionally not showing them otaku.

68. JNTO, *JNTO hōnichi gaikyaku jittai chōsa 2006–2007: Manzokudo chōsa hen* (JNTO survey of foreign visitors to Japan 2006–2007: Level of satisfaction) (Tokyo: International Tourism Center of Japan, 2008).

69. Ibid.

70. Not even *Akiba keizai shimbun,* the most official source of information on Akihabara, mentioned the demonstration.

71. Harajuku offers a parallel case study. Its pedestrian paradise was closed in 1996, a time when Iranian workers left jobless by the recession were gathering in nearby Yoyogi Park to do business. Fears that they might be dealing drugs were conflated with complaints about littering and noise pollution among rockabillies, bike gangs, and street performers, leading to police raids, mass deportations, and the suspension of the outdoor arcade. Like the cleanup in Akihabara, the events in Harajuku were indicative of socio-economic anxieties at the time.

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FAN-YI LAM

# Comic Market: How the World's Biggest Amateur Comic Fair Shaped Japanese *Dōjinshi* Culture

Without a doubt, the world's largest regular gathering of comic fans today is Tokyo's biannual Comic Market (Komikku Maaketto or Komike in Japanese, Comike or Comiket in English). Over three days, more than a half million people attend this gigantic festival of self-produced comics, music, and computer games, inspired by popular manga and anime as well as other forms of popular culture. Attendees stroll along endless rows of tables filled with a mind-boggling amount of fan works for sale, among costumed characters from anime, manga, television shows, and films—including, most recently, Harry Potter films. In addition to a sizable cosplay area, *otaku* can see and buy the newest toys, games, and fan art, as well as gather announcements from the hottest Japanese anime and game makers. Launched more than thirty years ago as a marketplace for selling and exchanging *dōjinshi* (literally "like-minded publications"), it has become the center of Japanese otaku—in other words, fan culture. About seven hundred participants and thirty-two exhibitors attended the first Comike in 1975; the seventy-sixth installment in August 2009 boasted a new record of approximately 560,000 participants and 35,000 exhibitors.

This essay examines how the Comike has changed in response to the rising popularity of the *dōjinshi* phenomenon and in particular what the emerging

innovations of the Comike might mean for the future of the *dōjinshi* culture. Although the *dōjinshi* phenomenon did not start with Comic Market, Comike and *dōjinshi* are inextricably linked, having shaped each other's history for three decades. A short sketch of the development of *dōjinshi* culture in Japan, from its beginnings through to the establishment of Comic Market, will reveal that the Comike convention has shaped the most important trends defining the development of *dōjinshi* in Japan today (Figure 1).

## BEFORE COMIC MARKET

Literary *dōjin zasshi* (like-minded magazines) first appeared during the Meiji period (1868–1912). These publications by literary circles contributed to the development of prewar Japanese literature and continue to play a significant role in the Japanese literary world today. *Dōjinshi* are an outgrowth of this practice, but the term can also refer to similar manga-related, fan-produced publications such as fanzines. Generally speaking, *dōjinshi* are amateur publications, written, illustrated, designed, published, and marketed by fans, usually employing manga-style art and semiotics.



**FIGURE 1.** The seventy-first Comic Market, December 29, 2006. One of the big east halls of the exhibition center, which is a little less than one-third of the available exhibition space for *dōjinshi* at the Comic Market (excluding company booths, cosplay area, and conference rooms). Photograph by author.

CRUCIALLY, AND FROM THE BEGINNING, COMIKE ATTRACTED VISITORS WHO WERE NOT JUST CIRCLE OR CLUB MEMBERS, AND WHO DID NOT NECESSARILY THEMSELVES PRODUCE FANWORKS.

Probably the first manga *dōjinshi* published in Japan was the Tokyo Mangakai's (Manga Society) experimental club publication *Tobae* in 1916.[1] Manga *dōjinshi* in the Taishō period (1912–26) were mostly the club bulletins of manga circles, fan groups that included both professional and semiprofessional artists. After the war, story manga and later *gekiga* (Japanese comics aimed at adults, popular in the '60s and '70s) became very popular, and many more amateur manga groups were established. Though these groups' members were mere manga fans, all were aiming to become professional artists.[2]

These groups' members exchanged information about drawing techniques, since artistic techniques during this period were largely unknown to the public and drawing materials were almost nonexistent.[3] But the biggest obstacle for the *dōjinshi* circles was a lack of affordable printing methods. Thus most *dōjinshi* were hand drawn rather than printed; these manuscripts were then circulated between club members, who, if necessary, split printing costs among themselves. Notable *dōjinshi* from this period include Ishinomori Shōtarō's *Bokuju itteki* (1953–57, One drop of ink) and the groundbreaking *Showa 24* shōjo manga artists' *Mahōtsukai* (1970–73, Sorcerer).

In Tezuka Osamu's manga art magazine *COM* (1966–72), *dōjinshi* circles briefly found a central place to come into contact with each other and to recruit new members.[4] *COM* encouraged all circles to publish their *dōjinshi* and to exchange them with other circles and with fans in general. When the magazine folded due to low sales, its legacy as a focal point of *dōjinshi* culture was taken up by a new institution: the *dōjinshi* convention.

## BIRTH OF A DŌJINSHI MARKET

When the Comic Market was first held, it was one among many well-known *dōjinshi* conventions such as Manga Communication or Nihon Manga Taikai (Japan Manga Convention), at which all kinds of groups producing manga- and anime-related fanworks could physically gather together in order to share, buy, and sell *dōjinshi*. *Dōjinshi* circles, anime fan societies and science fiction school clubs sat side-by-side exchanging *dōjinshi* and fanzines.[5]

But no fan scene is immune to controversies and imbroglios, and the Japanese *dōjinshi* scene was no exception. In 1975, a woman who had made critical remarks about the Manga Taikai was excluded from that convention, and

subsequently a firestorm of anger among fans produced a movement against the Manga Taikai led by the famous circle Meikyū (Labyrinth), which resulted in the conception of a new alternative convention. On December 21, 1975, the first Comic Market—"a fan event from fans for fans"—was held in Tokyo.[6]

Comike's underlying vision was of an open and unrestricted *dōjinshi* fair, offering a marketplace without limitations on content or access. At the time, manga and anime fandom was organized around formal circles (particularly the school clubs that charged membership fees and produced regular group publications), and conventions were gathering places for the *groups*—rather than that of individual fans. Crucially, and from the beginning, Comike attracted visitors who were not just circle or club members, and who did not necessarily themselves produce fanworks. This innovation created its now massive popularity in Japan and increasingly, with international fans as well. Comike was soon held three times a year, attracting ever-increasing numbers of groups and fans.[7]

With the advent of these fan-consumers (as opposed to fan-creators), *dōjinshi* became demand-driven publications. Greater competition gradually fostered rising standards of quality, which in turn attracted more circles and buyers. Higher sales shrank production costs and boosted profits, which could then be reinvested in the *dōjinshi* themselves. Small printing companies, many of which had begun in the *minikomi* (microcommunication) boom of the early 1970s, were able to use the profits derived from greater demand for their services to modernize their equipment, lowering production costs further and enabling them to construct their production schedules around each Comike.[8] Additionally, lower printing costs freed smaller groups from the dependence on bigger groups, which often had strict rules on content and style to avoid conflict among their many members. Having lost their raison d'être, these big clubs and circles gradually faded away, leaving *dōjinshi* creators to produce stories they liked, in the manner they liked.[9]

## ANIPARO BOOM

Despite low broadcast ratings, the 1974 anime *Uchū senkan Yamato* (Space Battleship Yamato) became something of a cult hit among the new generation of fans who had grown up in relative postwar prosperity, and the *aniparo dōjinshi* derived from the movie version was a huge hit at the fifth Comike, in the spring of 1977. By the time *Yamato*'s popularity faded, these proto-otaku had moved on to other anime such as *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979–80, *Kidō senshi*

*gandamu*) and *Rokushin gattai goddo Maasu* (1981–82, Six-god union god Mars).

As might be deduced from their name, *aniparo* parodied popular anime series, and in doing so, attracted a new type of fan to Comike, beyond its core group of 2000 or so attendees. These were female fans, mostly middle and high school students strongly influenced by the 1970s florescence of *shōjo* manga. They began to create and consume *dōjinshi* in which the (*bishōnen* or "pretty boy") male protagonists of popular anime and manga were transposed into a very particular sort of erotic story typified by the phrase: "without tension" *(yama nashi)*, "without punchline" *(ochi nashi)*, and "without meaning" *(imi nashi)*—and hence the contemporary genre title, *yaoi*.[10]

*Aniparo* soon became the most popular *dōjinshi* genre at the Comic Market, fuelled by the disappearance of big fan circles and the appearance of professional anime magazines. Since their debut in the late 1970s, these publications had gradually rendered fanzines obsolete by poaching their customers and talent. Those fanzine creators who remained nonprofessional largely switched to *aniparo* or to the newest popular *dōjinshi* genre, lolicon.[11]

## LOLICON BOOM

The eleventh Comic Market in spring 1979 saw the popularity of the cute and pure *bishōjo* or "pretty girl" (strongly influenced by 1970s shōjo manga) skyrocket among men's *dōjinshi* circles, attracting many new male participants. Unlike the female *yaoi* fans who would one day christen themselves *fujoshi* (literally "rotten women"), these male lolicon (an abbreviation of the Japanese transliteration of "Lolita complex") fans had no popular anime series to adore, since at the time sexually desirable cute girls were rare in anime.[12] Lolicon fans idolized minor characters from popular anime such as Clarisse d'Cagliostro of Miyazaki Hayao's *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979, *Lupin III: Cagliostro no shiro*) or cute female protagonists from shōjo anime like Minky Momo, the eponymous heroine of *Mahō no princess Minkii Momo* (1982–83, Magical princess Minky Momo).

The Comic Market was dominated by women from the beginning (90 percent of its first participants were female), but in 1981, thanks to lolicon, male participants numbered the same as female participants for the first time in Comike's history.[13] With almost ten thousand participants, Comic Market was now Japan's biggest *dōjinshi* event and the center of *dōjinshi* culture. It grew big enough that the nineteenth Comic Market, in the winter of 1981, was held in the International Exhibition Center in Harumi. A year later, a

convention catalogue was sold for the first time, both to help visitors to find their favorite circles in the crowd of almost a thousand circles and to help finance Comic Market's expansion. Comike also encouraged the many fan-related companies to include advertisements in the catalog.[14]

Internal conflicts on the Comike planning committee underlay some of these developments: they marked the ascendancy of the faction led by Yonezawa Yoshihiro, who favored Comike's unlimited expansion.[15] Though he was criticized for purportedly selling *dōjinshi* out to commercialism, Yonezawa couched his plans for Comike in terms of a collective organization of the convention by all participants, including staff, circles, and visitors.[16] Whatever the underlying reality, these public principles remain little changed today.[17]

The early 1980s were a perilous time for *dōjinshi* and anime fandom. The first generation of Comike participants were now employed and in many cases raising children, greatly limiting their time to participate in fandom and *dōjinshi* activities. At the same time, the expanding *animanga* industry had "discovered" the hardcore fans who would soon be dubbed "otaku," targeting them with new products that were often produced by former *dōjinshi* creators. In addition, the hyperinflation of real estate prices that caused and was engendered by the Bubble economy, raised exhibition halls' rental rates precipitously. Faced with this loss of identity, talent, and space, every other large fan convention except Comike dissolved.

## YAOI BOOM

But in the middle of the decade, one manga and its anime not only saved *dōjinshi* fandom from near extinction but was responsible for its biggest boom yet. Takahashi Yōichi's *Captain Tsubasa* (1981–88, *Kyaputen tsubasa*), about boys competing in the then-exotic sport of soccer, felt like a mixture of shōnen and shōjo manga in its depiction of both competition and friendship between boys (in contrast to the *gekiga*-esque martial arts manga that had formerly dominated the sports genre).[18] From 1986, *bishōnen* soccer stars' homoerotic and homosexual *dōjinshi* exploits stoked female fans and creators' fantasies and shifted *yaoi* to the center of female otaku-ism, which today is known as *fujoshi* culture.[19] Within a year, attendance at Comike nearly doubled (to approximately sixty thousand in winter 1987), and a majority of attendees were again women. Popular titles like *Seint Seiya* (1986–90) and the anime *Ronin Warriors* (1988–89, *Yoroiden samurai trooper*) held women's interest after *Captain Tsubasa* ended serialization.

In contrast to the earlier *aniparo* phenomenon, the *yaoi* boom was dominated by young women just out of high school who—unlike their counterparts in earlier decades—now had everything they needed to create *dōjinshi*: manga drawing techniques and tools. Photocopiers had become common, and an entire rapid-printing industry had arisen, offering all-inclusive services from manuscript touchup to professional offset printing, to delivery direct to Comike for reasonable prices. New *dōjinshi* conventions appeared, and manga shops began selling *dōjinshi* on commission. Comparatively lush, custom-made, oversized *dōjinshi* with more than one hundred pages became common, and popular circles could now live on their fanworks' profits (Figure 2).[20]

Comike was now held over two days (one each for men and women), completely filling Japan's biggest convention centers in Harumi and Makuhari. However, it was still plagued by issues such as a severe imbalance between the numbers of applicant circles and of exhibitors' spots, as well as continued financial troubles brought on by the catalog's production costs.[21] With the length of entrance queues in front of the convention halls exceeding two kilometers and even professional creators like Toriyama Akira of *Dragonball* fame participating, the *dōjinshi* world clearly had entered a bubble of its own—a far cry from previous decades when professional artists saw *dōjinshi* as youthful peccadilloes.



**FIGURE 2.** The seventy-first Comic Market, December 29, 2006. A typical "shutter circle" selling parody *dōjinshi* popular among females. Buyers have to stay in lines for minutes or even hours, and they are often sold out by noon. Photograph by author.

## ANTIMANGA MOVEMENT

When thirty-six-year old Miyazaki Tsutomu was arrested in July 1989 for the murder of four schoolgirls, the term "otaku" overnight became infamous and feared nationwide, implicating Comike, as the largest gathering place of "that kind" of person. The ensuing hysterical antimanga movement forced Comike out of Makuhari and subjected *dōjinshi* to some of the restrictions placed on pornography—such as the removal or retouching of genitalia. Comike staff checked all *dōjinshi* for compliance to new rules prior to each event.[22] Despite the self-censorship brought on by the mass media's criticism, Comike nevertheless continued to thrive. Young men tired of new, tighter restrictions on professional manga turned to Comike, and attendance once again swelled to 230,000 in the summer of 1990.[23]

Hardcore lolicon was now passé, and erotic *dōjinshi* for men had greatly changed. New genres were introduced with such aspects as fetishism and a new style of softcore eroticism enjoyed by men and women alike; in particular, *yuri* (lily), or lesbian stories, emerged.[24] *Dōjinshi* also became smaller and shorter due to professional publishers recruiting talented *dōjinshi* creators en masse: the bulk of *dōjinshi* were the works of the less talented creators left behind.[25]

## OTAKU REVOLUTION

After the exhaustion of the antimanga movement and the collapse of the Bubble economy, Comic Market was held biannually, with around 200,000 participants during each event (Figure 2). In 1996, the convention moved to the new International Exhibition Center in Odaiba, Japan's biggest convention center. But after a new otaku boom engendered by the epochal anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–96, *Shinseiki evangerion*) even the capacity of the new convention space was soon exhausted. As a result, the summer Comike was regularly held over three days from 1997.[26]

Other factors contributing to the increased interest in *dōjinshi* and in fanworks were the development of fixed otaku landmarks and the spread of computers. Almost everyone could now afford to make digital *dōjinshi* as well as audiovisual or even interactive *dōjinshi* (i.e. *dōjin* music and *dōjin* games). While self-produced figures (model kits), music, and games were not new, they had been possible only for a small group of people with specialized equipment and expertise.[27] The personal technology revolution meant

simplification of fanworks' production processes as well as completely new possibilities for communication and new digital genres. With the growth of *dōjinshi* in other media, the term "*dōjin* products" (*dōjin seihin*) has gradually come into use to describe fanworks of all genres.

Further, the conversion of Tokyo's Akihabara "Electric Town" into a district full of shops selling otaku-related goods, as well as the nationwide expansion of otaku-goods retailers and the establishment of Internet communities and message boards in the late 1990s, enabled otaku to live out their interests and to communicate nonstop with like-minded people everywhere. Their interests and culture were easily shared, and consequently information on Comic Market and *dōjin* culture spread around the world.

THE PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION MEANT SIMPLIFICATION OF FANWORKS' PRODUCTION PROCESSES AS WELL AS COMPLETELY NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR COMMUNICATION AND NEW DIGITAL GENRES.

The rise of the Internet also meant that Comike lost its monopoly as the center of otaku and *dōjinshi* culture. Nevertheless, Comike remained the most important event for Japanese fans, especially after companies with otaku-related products started to exploit it.[28] Firms had been interested in Comic Market for decades as a never-ending pool of promising new talent and as a place to exploit them commercially, and they were willing to pay much money for direct access to these masses of otaku.[29] Starting with NEC in the summer of 1995, companies were granted exhibition space to market or to sell their newest products. This was the birth of the dealer booth at Comike, and, as with *dōjinshi* circles, the number of applicant companies was much higher than that of available spaces: a self-sustaining event with such high attendance was too important for any related company to ignore.[30] Companies accepted the existence of unlicensed parody *dōjinshi* using copyrighted material (albeit in a transformative and thus arguably fair-use manner) since they could now sell exclusive goods at Comike (Figure 3) or use it as a marketing place, attracting to the convention people who were not interested in *dōjinshi*.

## DŌJIN STARS

Since the 1980s, it has become common for talented *dōjinshi* creators to be recruited by professional companies and become popular on the mass market. Many famous artists have had a past in the *dōjinshi* scene or are still involved.

Artists—including Ozaki Minami (1989–91, *Zetsuai*) or CLAMP (2003–9, *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle*; 1992–present, *X: 1999*)—became famous in the *dōjinshi* world before conquering the professional market, and artists such as Koge-Donbo (1999–2003, *Pitaten*) and Hiroe Rei (2002–present, *Black Lagoon*) are still very active, regularly selling *dōjinshi* at fairs. *Dōjinshi* like Masamune Shirow's *Black Magic* (1983) or Minekura Kazuya's *Saiyuki* (1997–2002) were directly converted into popular professional works.

Professional artists selling *dōjin* products on the side (Figure 4) have been a common practice for a long time. In the summer of 2004, 5 percent of all circles participating in Comike were headed by a professional *mangaka* or illustrator, while another 10 percent had some professional experience.[31] Similarly, it is common for erotic game producers to allow their underpaid artists to sell their drafts and sketches as *dōjinshi*, giving the artists a second wage and the company free promotion.[32]

After the growth of cross-linked otaku markets, the developments and innovations of personal technologies and the now-giant *dōjinshi* market; the stage was set for a *dōjin* work to conquer the professional markets. The *dōjin* product that became the first megahit in the *dōjin* scene (with many parody *dōjinshi* of its own), and received a professional manga and anime adaptation



**FIGURE 3.** The seventy-first Comic Market, December 29, 2006, at 10:30 AM, thirty minutes after the official opening of the Comic Market. Although waiting and freezing in line since 8 AM, it was not possible to enter the exhibition halls until 10:45 AM due to huge masses of visitors. Photograph by author.




**FIGURE 4.** The sixty-sixth Comic Market, August 13, 2004. The booth of the biggest *dōjinshi* goods retailer "Toranoana" at the company area. The booth was selling exclusive goods only available at the Comic Market. Photograph by author.

(including multimedia merchandising), was the *dōjin* game *Tsukihime* (Moon princess), created in 2000 by *dōjin* circle Type-Moon. This erotic adventure game had "professional-quality" visuals and narrative, and Type-Moon actively merchandized it by selling bonus disks and other products at *dōjinshi* fairs and in *dōjinshi* shops. The circle also created joint projects with other popular circles, producing popular spinoff games and fan books. Backed by a strong fan base, Type-Moon set up a company named Notes in 2003, and became a successful computer game production firm.

Two other *dōjin* games, *Higurashi no naku koro ni* (2002–6, When they cry) by the circle 07th Expansion and *Tōhō Project* (1996–present, Orient project) by the Shanghai Alice Gengakudan circle, later became commercial hits of a similar or even surpassing scale. However, this phenomenon is not some kind of "amateur revolution." Type-Moon's Nasu Kinoko and Takeuchi Takashi and 07th Expansion's Ryūkishi07 had already made steps into the professional industry before becoming famous in the *dōjinshi* scene. Much like Shinkai Makoto—the fan-creator of the OVA *Voices of a Distant Star* (2002, *Hoshi no koe*)—these creators already had made a career in the professional industry and were adored by fans for their passion and talents, rather than for their amateur status.[33]

While *Tsukihime* stood out in the very small *dōjin* game scene of its time (the game is said to have sold more than 65,000 copies) due to its quality, in 2004, *Higurashi* became famous through a free test version and consequently the *dōjin* game series' nine installments sold about 500,000 copies.[34] Despite being active since 1996, *Tōhō Project* became widely known only about ten years later, not so much through the game itself as through its music and characters, which became popular objects of jokes and memes in Internet communities. Despite its relative newness, *Higurashi* became one of Japan's biggest media phenomena, and at the seventy-sixth Comic Market in summer 2009, *Tōhō Project* became the first *dōjin* title ever to receive the honor of being considered its own genre.[35]

## COMIKE TODAY

Upon the appearance of Web 2.0 sites like YouTube or DeviantART (and especially their explicitly Japanese counterparts NicoNico Dōga and Pixiv) one might think that Comic Market as a physical and costly event would suffer from losing its monopoly on being the center of Japanese fan art. But once again Comike was the beneficiary of a new fan praxis: attendance reached new heights in 2007 (well over 500,000 people), a year without any outstandingly popular property to attract new visitors. It seems that *dōjinshi* circles are not switching entirely to the Internet but rather are using it as an informational and marketing platform for themselves and their creations, spreading the knowledge of and fascination with Comic Market to new spheres. The best example of this phenomenon is the already-mentioned *Tōhō Project,* which became popular mostly through Web 2.0 outlets.

Having been the center of Japanese manga fandom for more than thirty years, Comic Market appears stronger than ever. Through time and the development of new genres and new technologies, it has grown from a small fan event to a mass happening, from a *dōjinshi* fair to a multimedia market. The 2009 summer event had the highest participant numbers ever, approximately 560,000. With high attendance, positive media attention, and industry support, Comike's position seems invulnerable. Even the deaths of important figures such as Iwata Tsuguo in 2004 and Yonezawa Yoshihiro—who was the face of Comike for decades—in 2006 did not harm its position. But unresolved problems, such as the use of copyrighted material in parody *dōjinshi* and the child pornography questions inherent in lolicon and *shotakon,* remain.[36] Though these are not Comic Market–specific problems, as the obvious center

IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT COMIKE POSSESSES THE POWER AND THE MEANS TO INFLUENCE SOCIAL, MARKET, AND EVEN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS.

and most important institution of otaku and *dōjinshi* culture, the convention would be among the first to face these issues' potential detrimental consequences: Comike's future may change rapidly.

Comike was neither the first nor the biggest *dōjinshi* fair when it was established; its main purpose was to provide the freest market possible, and that freedom has come at a price. The dream of a Comic Market open to everyone and everything was never realized, as there were too many physical, financial, and legal restrictions. Even today, the Comic Market suffers from a lack of space, a lack of money, and a lack of legal security. Only two-thirds of applicant circles can participate due to constraints, since, as a small independent operator Comike's financial resources are limited and most of the work is done by volunteers.

## WHAT IS COMIC MARKET?

How can we understand Comike's value and meaning to fan culture? As early as 1998, Iwata concluded that the most important function of Comic Market was being a profoundly unique *place* (*ba*): the convention functions as a huge, semiprotected space in which certain liberties have been maintained.[37] Comike's history was determined almost completely by technological and market developments, which were driven by the emergence of collective tastes and trends inside and outside its participants' communities (Figure 5). At Comic Market, all these developments took place simultaneously in one space, to which there is still no entrance fee, and which, compared to many other similar venues or professional events, remains relatively unrestricted.

But can Comic Market be reduced completely to a physical place? It has never really been spatially fixed. If Tokyo Big Site lost its status as the biggest convention center, Comike would not hesitate to move to another location—if its community desired it. Though its most important function is still to provide a physical place, Comic Market has also become a symbol of the otaku and *dōjinshi* communities. It is not only by a wide margin the biggest *dōjinshi* event in Japan (and therefore related to many subcultural and independent media in Japan) (Figure 6), it is also the oldest such event, and the one most famous in the mass media. As the center of attention, with its size and its links to the industry, it is undeniable that Comike possesses the power and the means to influence social, market, and even political developments. In




**FIGURE 5.** Cover of an X-rated parody *dōjinshi* by Hiroe Rei sold on August 19, 2007, at the seventy-second Comic Market. Hiroe is the artist of the famous action manga *Black Lagoon* and well-known for his *dōjinshi* activities, which includes parody *dōjinshi*. Titled *Raidā-san to asobō* (Let's play with Rider-san), this book is a fan comic for the adventure-novel game "Fate / stay night" by Notes / Type-Moon.



**FIGURE 6.** The sixty-sixth Comic Market, August 13, 2004. A group of cosplayers as characters from Square-Enix's hit MMORPG Final Fantasy XI at the cosplay area. Although it was very hot and muggy, many cosplayers were wearing extravagant costumes. Photograph by author.

recent years it has not been reluctant to use this power. Whether through conferences on copyright issues or on the establishment of a "National *dōjinshi* fair liaison group" (*Zenkoku dōjinshi sokubaikai renrakukai*) in 2000, it has taken on the responsibility of representing and of regulating Japanese *dōjinshi* culture.

The Comic Market has been without question the most important institution and authority in the *dōjinshi* world for more than two decades. While it was crucial to the development of modern *dōjinshi* and manga fan culture, we can safely state that it surely will not be the end of either.

## Notes

1. Shimizu Isao, *Manga no rekishi* (History of manga) (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1999), 45–46.

2. Ajima Jun, *Manga dōjinshi etosetora '82–'98* (Manga *dōjinshi* et cetera '82–'98) (Tokyo: Kubo Shoten, 2004), 12–15. Ajima Jun is a pseudonym of Yonezawa Yoshihiro.

3. Iwata Tsuguo, *Dōjnshi baka ichidai: Iaemon ga nokoshita mono* (Lifelong a *dōjinshi* idiot: What Iaemon left) (Tokyo: Kubo Shoten, 2005), 45.

4. Tezuka tried with this magazine to find a third way for Japanese comics between childish manga and "adult," often socially critical *gekiga*. For Tezuka and his work, see Susanne Philipps, *Tezuka Ozamu: Figuren, Themen, und Erzählstrukturen im Manga-Gesamtwerk* (Munich: Iudicum Verlag, 2000), 188.

5. Though *dōjinshi* is often translated as "fanzine" (e.g., Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* [Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 1996], 37), late Comic Market president Yonezawa made a clear distinction between manga *dōjinshi* and fanzines (Ajima, *Manga dōjinshi,* 16).

6. Komikku Maaketto junbikai (Comic Market Planning Committee), *Komikku Maaketto 30's fairu* (Comic Market 30's file) (Tokyo: Seirinkōgeisha, 2005), 28–29.

7. Ajima, *Manga dōjinshi,* 16.

8. Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 104–5.

9. Iwata, *Dōjinshi baka,* 48–50.

10. The term *yaoi* first appeared in 1979 as a sort of gag *aniparo* but was not associated with strong homophile connotations and meanings or in popular use. This had changed by 1986. Yonezawa Yoshihiro, *Ureru manga, kioku ni nokoru manga* (Manga that sell and manga that remain in memories) (Tokyo: Media Factory, 2007), 85.

11. Ajima, *Manga dōjinshi,* 22.

12. According to an interview with Comic Market Planning Committee members Satomi Naoki and Yasuda Kaoru on January 22, 2007, most female characters in shōnen series were mothers or big-sister types.

13. Komikku Maaketto, *Komikku Maaketto,* 32. On the circles side, female artists were always a majority.

14. Komikku Maaketto, *Komikku Maaketto,* 126.

15. Yonezawa held onto these ideas until the very end. Yonezawa, *Ureru,* 194.

16. Komikku Maaketto, *Komikku Maaketto,* 92, 94–96.

17. Iwata, *Dōjnshi baka,* 12–13. These principles can be found in any Comic Market catalog.

18. Saitō Jirō, *Shōnen janpu no jidai* (The age of *Shōnen Jump*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 157.

19. For the meanings of *yaoi* for *fujoshi* culture, please refer to the work of Sugiura Yumiko. Otaku joshi kenkyū, fujoshi shisō taikei (Female otaku research, the "rotten girls'" ideology) (Tky: Hara Shob, 2006).

20. Iwata, *Dōjinshi baka,* 54–56.

21. Komikku Maaketto, *Komikku Maaketto,* 132–34.

22. For an analysis and description of the antimanga movement, see Kinsella, *Adult Manga,* 126–61.

23. Komikku Maaketto, *Komikku Maaketto,* 155–56.

24. Ibid., 184–85.

25. Iwata, *Dōjinshi baka,* 60–61.

26. The winter Comic Market followed one year later but fluctuated between two and three days' length until 2005. The winter event has always been less popular than the summer event.

27. Iwata, *Dōjinshi baka,* 61–63.

28. Nomura Research Institute, *Otaku shijō no kenkyū* (Research on the otaku market) (Tokyo: Tōyō keizai shinpōsha, 2005), 34–35.

29. Many famous manga artists were or still are part of the *dōjinshi* scene, including Ishinomori Shōtarō, Takahashi Rumiko, Ozaki Minami, and CLAMP.

30. For a detailed analysis of this topic, see my Magister thesis. Schattenmarkt Dōjinshi Amateur-Publikationen und die japanische Manga-Industrie (The dōjinshi shadow market – amateur publications and the Japanese manga industry) (Berlin, 2008; not published); Komikku Maaketto, *Komikku Maaketto,* 284–86.

31. Ibid., 294.

32. Iwata, *Dōjinshi baka,* 61–62.

33. Morikawa Kaichirō, *Shuto no tanjō* (Birth of a personapolis) (Tokyo: Gentosha, 2003), 222–23.

34. Komikku Maaketto, *Komikku Maaketto,* 225; "Jihihanbai geimu 'Higurashi . . .' eigaka" (Self-made game "Higurashi . . ." becoming a movie), http://www.nikkansports.com/entertainment/cinema/f-et-tp1-20070813-240910.html, accessed August 14, 2007.

35. The exhibitors' spaces are divided into different genres. Normally these are general categories such as "Shōnen Anime" or "History." For a single title or company to become its own genre shows its huge popularity among *dōjinshi* fans. Normally this honor is reserved for extremely popular shōnen manga such as *Naruto* (1999–present) or *Prince of Tennis* (1999–2008, *Tenisu no ōji-sama*).

36. *Shotakon* is an erotic *yaoi* genre featuring young boys. The term *shotakon* became widely known in 1981 by the *dōjinshi* magazine *Fanroad* and comes from "Shōtarō complex" named after the hero from the manga *Tetsujin 28-gō* (1956–66, Iron-man No. 28). Yonezawa, *Ureru,* 84–85.

37. Iwata, *Dōjin baka,* 42.

# Styles of Intervention

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AMAMIYA KARIN

*Translated and with an Introduction by Jodie Beck*

# Suffering Forces Us to Think beyond the Right–Left Barrier

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Amamiya Karin is a writer with a complex and interesting relation to the notion of fandom. She came to the media's attention as the subject of a 1999 film documentary about an ultranationalist punk band, of which she was a member. Since then, she has attracted wide notice and a wide following as a spokesperson for a generation that increasingly feels left behind.

Amamiya was born in 1975 in Hokkaido and now resides in Tokyo. She is a prolific writer and speaker with an agenda that has its roots in her own background: she has written extensively about her own personal history of *ijime* (being bullied at school), self-mutilation, and multiple suicide attempts, relating her own experiences to a wider trend of "suffering" (*ikitzurasa*) among members of Japan's "lost generation." Her early sense of loss, economic instability, and lack of direction led her to seek comfort and a sense of belonging in Japanese nationalism, and she became a member of the right-wing organization Totsugekitai as well as the singer for the ultranationalist punk band "The Revolutionary Truth."

Amamiya has also allied herself with Japan's "working poor" and the "precariat" movement (a neologism made by combining *precarious* with the *-iat* of *proletariat*). "Precarity," "precariat," and related terms have been used in various countries to refer to groups of workers in unstable or precarious positions, and the material and psychological effects on their overall quality of life. Among Japan's precariat, Amamiya includes such groups as *furiitaa* or "freeters": freelance workers, temporary workers, undocumented workers, and others with low or unstable wages, few or no benefits, and little job security. The concept of precarity thus brings together various groups of workers through shared vulnerability as the basis for a common cause.

Amamiya has worked with Tsuchiya Yutaka on the films *Atarashii kamisama* (1999, The new god) and *Peep "TV" Show* (2004).[1] *Atarashii kamisama* uses a documentary style to delve into the conflicting views between Amamiya's right-wing nationalism and Tsuchiya's views as a leftist, activist filmmaker with an antinationalist, anti–emperor system stance. In the film, we see the beginnings of Amamiya's search to find common ground through proactive dialogue and debate between her right-wing politics and that of older ultraleftist members of the Japanese Red Army. The idea that people of radically opposed political views can work together against a "common enemy" or a common social problem such as precarity is also taken up in the text below.

After *Atarashii kamisama,* Amamiya and Tsuchiya cowrote the film *Peep "TV" Show,* which looks at the experiences and angst of the generation of Japanese living in a post-9/11 surveillance society. The film questions such concepts as "public" and "private" in an information age in which narratives of "terror" circulate on a massive scale.

Amamiya recently wrote the introduction to the rerelease of proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji's *Kani kōsen* (1929, Cannery ship), a novel that she felt spoke to Japan's contemporary precariat despite a gap of about eighty years since its original publication.[2] Norma Field notes that "Amamiya observed [in the daily *Mainichi* newspaper] that, reading *Cannery Ship,* she was struck by how the conditions depicted mirrored the current desperate situation of young workers."[3] A leftist writer who had garnered little attention since his torture and death at the hands of authorities in 1933, Takiji has enjoyed a recent surge of interest in Japan, particularly among a younger generation, and Amamiya's contribution to the new release of Takiji's novel has arguably played a role in this. This sudden and explosive interest in Takiji coincided with recognition of the severity of the economic situation and realization of the role political and economic policies were playing in creating an "income-gap society." Norma Field argues that the "Takiji boom" was "manufactured and real":

> What was required for that to happen was not only a widespread acknowledgement of economic crisis, but the much more difficult recognition—for a society habituated to regarding itself as homogeneously middle-class—that the solutions being adopted were creating dramatic disparities.[4]

In recent years, Amamiya has thus reconsidered many of her political ideas, suggesting that suffering and uncertainty may not be so simply addressed in terms of the political right or left. She has left both the ultranationalist punk band as well as the right-wing organization of her earlier days. Her political stance has changed considerably throughout her career, in what may be seen as a continued effort to develop and seek a way to move beyond a divisive or static political stance. Her passionate investment in issues of precarity and suffering can therefore be seen as one that has not led to a dogmatic agenda but rather as one that continues to evolve. Her writings and the publications in which they appear reflect this refusal to neatly compartmentalize experience. Field concludes that "Amamiya, in her early thirties, seems to effortlessly cross the boundaries between old and new left and new new left, liberal, socialist, and communist publications."[5]

She continues to work on issues including neoliberalism, globalization, and their effects on the "lost generation" of Japan, often appearing on television talk show panels. Her publications include *Iki jigoku tengoku* (2000, Living hell heaven), *Jisatsu no kosuto* (2002, The cost of suicide), and *Aku no Sūjiku o tazunete* (2003, Visiting the Axis of Evil).[6] This essay, subtitled "In the Wasteland after the Bubble Burst," was published in May 2008 in a special issue of the magazine *Rosujene / Lost Generation*.[7] Starting from some comments on her own celebrity, the author touches on a number of issues related to fandom and subcultures, including manga politics, the conflation of consumption with identity, and the double-edged sense of division and belonging generated by ideological labels.

## SUFFERING FORCES US TO THINK BEYOND THE RIGHT–LEFT BARRIER

Recently various people have said that I am "becoming leftist." The newspaper *Akahata* wrote "Patriotic Punk Goes Around to the Left." When I speak at public events, the epithet "previously right-wing and now left-wing" is sometimes attached to my name. And the fact that I became a member of the editorial committee of *Shūkan Kin'yōbi* in January of this year seems to be

perceived as the decisive evidence. But when people say that I am becoming leftist, I feel extremely uncomfortable.

In the first place, the reason people originally started saying that was because I had become involved with the precariat movement (the precarious proletariat), and started covering and writing about it as a main theme. Included in "the precariat" are the types of people typified as "freeters,"[8] such as irregular employees and NEETs,[9] regular employees and self-employed people who are forced to do "free overtime," and even people like me who do freelance writing. It is an opposition movement against the fact that people all over the world are forced into instability because of neoliberalism, which is advancing globalization.

As I proceeded to collect information on things like suffering and suicide, I had really come to feel that no matter what we do, there's "no way out." There were young people all around me committing suicide, denying their own existence, just repeating that they wanted to die. One day, after looking into the hearts of these people day after day, I realized that maybe there is a structural problem behind their suffering. And the word that hit the mark was *precariat*, and one "enemy" that came to mind was neoliberalism.

The word "neoliberalism" had appeared at points here and there before, but the dots were now connected into a clear line. A lot of so-called mental health-ers [people with mental health problems] come from the generation that grew up during what people called the "job market ice age." One of my acquaintances who committed suicide first became depressed after failing employment exams at a hundred companies. And I myself got canned from my job on the first day countless times when I was a freeter. At those times not so long ago, I blamed myself and attempted suicide again and again. My younger brother, who graduated from university during the job market ice age, became a freeter and several years later got a job at Yamada Denki, where he was forced to work eighteen hours a day and almost died from overwork.

At a time when we were feeling so much instability within our own hearts, the idea of "working normally and making a living" itself was becoming unstable in this country. It was a warped picture: poorly paid freeter or regular full-time employee fated to die from overwork. Yet people say that this predicament is a matter of "personal responsibility" and freeters have continued to experience bashing. In the meantime, homelessness among freeters of my generation is becoming more visible. All at once the freeter issue has changed from a matter of working on your own terms to one of having the right to survive.

Even if you work, you can't live. You can't eat. For irregular employees unemployment is always a presupposition: there is no guarantee that one day

you won't suddenly lose your job. So, young people found their way into the net cafes and the streets. A homeless man in his thirties told me that once, when he first started living on the street, he didn't eat anything for two weeks. If things continue like this, it is just a matter of time before those who were once freeters start dying of starvation. So this is why for me, the issue of unstable employment has changed from a matter of working style to a matter of life and death.

THE PRECARIAT MOVEMENT IS AN OPPOSITION MOVEMENT AGAINST THE FACT THAT PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE FORCED INTO INSTABILITY BECAUSE OF NEOLIBERALISM, WHICH IS ADVANCING GLOBALIZATION.

Now, because of that, people have started telling me that I have become leftist, but I don't think this is the type of problem that can be divided into right and left. And I myself have not consciously changed from "right" to "left." So, let's take a look back at the time that I became a rightist.

## THE REASON THAT I JOINED A RIGHT-WING ORGANIZATION AT AGE TWENTY-TWO

I had come across right-wing groups by the end of 1996, and the next year I joined a New Right organization known as "Totsugekitai" at the age of twenty-two. What I want to make clear here is the fact that this was not what you might imagine when you think of so-called right-wing organizations. Normally, the first thing that comes to mind when you hear "right-wing" is probably something like extortion. But Totsugekikai never did anything like that. The members generally worked and put the money they earned into the organization little by little as activity fees. Being that type of organization, we didn't have a campaign car either. When we spoke on the streets, we made a stage in front of the train station, stood there on the ground, and made our address. Another image that people have when they hear "right-wing" is that it's the next step after the *bōsōzoku,*[10] but in the organization I belonged to, there were almost none of those kinds of people.

A right-wing organization campaigning using money from their own pockets, not riding around making announcements from a campaign car, with no delinquent *bōsozōku* graduates. So what kind of people were they? Well, they were young people like me. In short, freeters who had junior high or high school educations. Why did they end up in that organization? The

only answer is that when they thought seriously about Japan and about themselves, "it just happened."

Actually, they were surprisingly serious. And looking back, I myself was also almost too serious and clumsy at the time. In fact, there were countless ways that I could be duped. By shopping, dating, karaoke, live shows, video games—those kinds of amusements. In any case, there was this overwhelming flood of propaganda telling us just to do stuff like *that*. Really, it was enough to make you nauseous. But we realized it. We knew that this was not the time or place to be doing that kind of thing, and that something very grave was being hidden from us, and that if we didn't do anything about it, it might have life-and-death consequences for us.

Actually, if I took a good look in front of me, I saw nothing but a huge mountain of rubble. But that rubble was invisible to "stable adults." I had to walk all alone on top of that pile of debris. "If you make the effort, you will be rewarded"; "lifetime employment"; "when I become an adult, I'll probably become an OL,[11] get married, and have a couple kids"—after all those murmurs in the back of my mind had crumbled and gone, that pile of rubble was all that was left. Living in the so-called recession or job market ice age after the economic bubble burst, I knew in my heart that day by day I continued to lose more, and that my own will had nothing to do with it. I knew it from the way that a guy at my part-time workplace confessed that he was unable to go to the university of his choice and was working there because his father was in enormous debt after the bubble burst. I knew it from the way my salary kept going down little by little, and from the way that I couldn't see anything beyond life as a freeter, and from the way that the future just around the corner was far too unclear. "Even if you work here full-time, you won't be able to live on that. Is that ok?" That's what the manager said once when I went to a part-time job interview, as though it was the most natural thing in the world. The salary was about 800 or 900 yen per hour. It was a blunt way to put it, but the manager was definitely right. "Even if you work full-time, you won't be able to live on that." Ever since the phrase "working poor" came out more than ten years ago, places that employ freeters have been making the most of all this. And the strange thing is that nobody even questioned it. "Well, you're a freeter, aren't you?" Although the bubble had already burst, the bubble period's image of freeters as "working on their own terms" remained strong. Having just been told that even if I worked full time I wouldn't be able to eat, I still asked for the job. In the end, I was fired after working there for about three months. One morning I called in sick because I had a cold, and I was told, "Oh, you don't have to come in anymore." Ever so casually. With no sense of guilt whatsoever.

From age nineteen on, my life was a repetition of things like that. It was the middle of the job market ice age when I graduated from high school in 1993, failed the beauty college entrance examinations twice, and gave up going on to higher education; there was no other course but to live as a freeter. I felt like I was alone, floating and drifting about five centimeters apart from "society." I wanted to fit in, but there was no place for me. I was searching for a place where people would let me in.

I had absolutely no idea what was happening to me. But the worst thing was that every time I got fired, I felt hurt. I felt hopeless, like I wasn't needed by anybody anywhere. The work at my part-time jobs was boring, simple stuff that anybody could do. So, not being needed even for trivial work like that, how could I justify myself?

A lot of my friends were also freeters. Of those, there were some who were enjoying their lifestyles. They were good at floating along on "an endless everyday" and at discovering fun and interesting things right in front of their eyes. They knew the art of living a fun life by always putting things off. But when they entered their thirties, started looking for stable jobs, and realized that there was nothing in this country to take up the slack, there were also some who took their own lives. But before then, there was no way for them to know that about the future. For me, I couldn't put off the instability of the here and now, and I always blamed myself for being so bad at living my life.

There was a friend who joined the right-wing organization with me who also couldn't float along on "an endless everyday." He always said to me, "Our future is definitely going to be homelessness, isn't it." I wanted to deny it, but how could I? Because now that somebody had actually said it to me, I knew that it was true. "Unable to live even if I worked full-time," I depended on my parents for part of my living expenses. In particular, I always went crying to them for money when it looked like I would fall behind on my rent payments. At those times my parents would just say, "Do something about it" or "Get a proper job," and things like that that I didn't want to hear. What I wanted to avoid hearing most of all was, "You know, Dad isn't going to be healthy forever" or "You know, we are going to die before you are." When they told me that, I knew that the color drained from my face as though I'd been struck by sudden anemia. If my parents died or stopped being able to work, what would happen to me? My friend's word, "homeless," suddenly tasted bitterly real. I knew all too well that it was difficult to escape from the life of a freeter. That was because the job market ice age was getting even worse. And even in the middle of that, huge numbers of new graduates were being spit out into society every year. There was no way to win. And I didn't even have enough energy left to

take action to escape from the freeter life. Every day I was pressed enough just making my daily living. Even after turning thirty, would I still have to keep scraping along, living on 900 yen an hour? Or even after turning forty, or fifty?

## THE REASON THAT AUM SHINRIKYŌ SHONE LIKE A BRIGHT LIGHT TO ME

We realized that the era had changed at its very foundations, simply because just working normally and living from day to day could be so difficult. Without being able to express it in language, we could perceive deep down that society now greeted young people with an entirely new degree of coldness. There was this feeling of urgency, that we couldn't even live our lives based on the common sense and values that we had held until then. *I've got to think seriously about this. My own future. How am I going to live? What is going to happen to me?* My head was always full of those words.

Around that time, Aum Shinrikyō carried out its sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway. These were young people, our age or a little order, abandoning "this world," striving for asceticism while somehow saying something incredibly huge—liberating humanity, saving the world, or whatever. For me, a freeter doing work that anybody could do, punching buttons on a cash register every day for 900 yen an hour, that image was like a shining light. In response to the attack, phrases like "the era of the heart" and "education for the heart" suddenly flooded the media. They even said that maybe an incident like this happened because Japan's postwar education or values were mistaken. Until then, what the "adults" around me were saying could be summarized as follows: First of all, beat your competitors. Kick people down and push your way as far up as possible. And finally, earn and spend as much money as you can. We had been taught that this is the only way to become happy. However, the waves of the recession suddenly made a huge lie of those words. Two months before the subway sarin gas attack, that "lie" was exposed in broad daylight. It was January 1995; my twentieth birthday was approaching. The Great Hanshin Earthquake. No matter how much money you earned or how much you spent, even if you added in a thirty-year mortgage and built a house, we saw it all turn into a pile of rubble on the spot. Two months later Aum, portrayed on TV as a "criminal organization," was refuting "materialism" and "money worship"; they were searching for a spiritual "something." For me, who wanted new kinds of values, values that weren't about money and objects, like I had been taught up until then, what they were doing looked awfully "right." Then in 1995, in

the midst of the confusion caused by the sarin gas attack and the earthquake, Nikkeiren [the Japan Federation of Employers' Associations] quietly put together a report called "Japanese-Style Management for a New Era," and we were left behind. The report proposed that working people be divided into three groups—"accumulated experience," "highly specialized," and "flexible employment"—and then used accordingly. It would make extensive revisions to the Worker Dispatch Law, and people who were already poor and precarious were forced into even deeper hardship.

THE ONLY THING THAT WAS CERTAIN WAS THAT IF I DIDN'T THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT POLITICS AND SOCIETY, I WOULD PLUNGE HEADLONG INTO A PERIOD IN WHICH I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SURVIVE.

## GŌSEN TAUGHT ME ABOUT SOCIETY FOR 370 YEN

However, at that time, I didn't know anything. All I had was a premonition that I wouldn't be able to make a living for much longer. And that's exactly why I wanted to know about the future of this country. The only thing that was certain was that if I didn't think seriously about politics and society, I would plunge headlong into a period in which I wouldn't be able to survive. My favorite book at that time was Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Gōmanizumu sengen.*[12] That was before his *Sensōron* (Theory of war) had come out. At that time *Gōmanizumu sengen* (*Gōsen*) was packed with all the "society" issues that I wanted to know about, like AIDS caused by tainted blood transfusions and the Aum problem. There was no other way for me to get to know about the world. Even if I had known of other options, they probably would have been out of my reach at the time. Books sold at the bookshops that dealt with issues like politics or society were really thick, and easily cost close to 2000 yen. But *Gōsen* was serialized in the weekly magazine "SPA!" which I could buy for 370 yen.

I fiercely wanted to know: about this society that I was living in; about how to live in a society whose bottom was starting to fall out; about the reality of the "postwar Japan" in which we were living; and about the reason that I couldn't help feeling this suffering in the midst of what people called "peace and prosperity."

The year 1995 was fifty years after the end of World War II. With my eyes suddenly opened to society, I greedily devoured the news circulating about the war in the summer of that year. And I got a shock that I never recovered from—all those tragic images of war. And the fact that watching from inside my air-conditioned room fifty years after the war, I had never even thought

about things like war up until then. Fifty years after the war, I was suffering in this country. What exactly was the war all about anyway?

## I SAW THE SANCTITY I HAD FORGOTTEN IN THE RIGHT-WING UNIFORM

*This person might teach me.* After Kobayashi Yoshinori, the next person to make me think that was the author Misawa Chiren. Having converted from left-wing to right-wing, he spent twelve years in prison for murder and the Molotov cocktail guerilla attack on the British Embassy, won a literary prize while incarcerated, and had only just gotten out of prison. And it was not only the literary world that he was involved in: at the time he also had a lot of work serialized in the magazine *Subculture Angler* and was always agitating for young people who were living among the "obstacles" of the century's end. Not satisfied with acts of self-mutilation like piercing and tattoos, he said if you have anger or frustration, pick a fight with the state. I too was one of those young people who repeatedly cut my wrists as an act of self-mutilation. As he pointed out, I had anger. And frustration. Only I had no idea where to direct it.

I joined the New Right organization, Totsugekitai, which he had profiled in the tattoo magazine *BURST!* Totsugekitai was introduced amid photos of dead bodies, piercings, full-body tattoos, and body modification. In "postwar Japan," this trash dump of a place that I couldn't possibly have any faith in, this image of young people valiantly sporting their uniforms brought back a "sanctity" that I had long since forgotten.

Before that, I had also gone to left-wing gatherings. But the language they used was difficult, and I had no idea what they were talking about. After that, the Totsugekitai meetings that I went to, with their simple language, drove away my depression.

## "IN THIS COUNTRY WITH NOTHING BUT MATERIALISTS AND MONEY-WORSHIPPERS, IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING!"

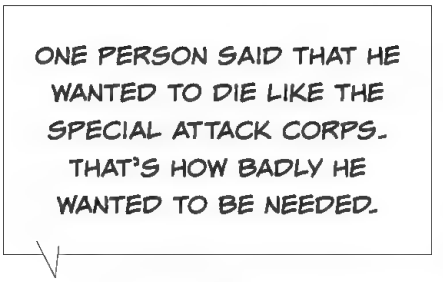
I joined the organization. It was right before the mass restructuring and lay-offs that took place at the beginning of the recession, when postwar Japan's values collapsed with a clatter. At a time when the media was alive with stupid

things like "Make *shabu shabu* without using a pan!" other young people like me were joining the organization. Until my teens, I thought that the future looked bright. I thought that I could live without worrying about going hungry and things like that if I just rode on the wave of the country's economic growth. But my expectations proved wrong. No matter how you looked at it, the future was bleak. It had become an age in which the common sense and everything else that had prevailed up until then were no longer valid. At that time, the young people who joined the organization were of course all of the same generation as me, and most of them were freeters with junior high or high school educations. And there were also some avid readers of *Gōsen.* We couldn't afford not to worry about where this country was headed, because it was really about ourselves. I was fed up with the propaganda that encouraged nothing but consumption despite being in such hard times. Floating along without being able to find a firm place in society, I constantly felt anxious. I wanted to belong somewhere. I couldn't feel any pride in myself as a member of the simple labor force, always being used and then thrown away. The words "Japanese pride" gently enveloped me. I seized a place for myself. In a right-wing organization.

So we all came together like that in front of Ochanomizu Station. At the time, Totsugekitai was making speeches at that station. Among the young people joined together there were also some ex-followers of Aum, who had left the group in the disorder after the sarin gas attack. There was no meaning to life in "this world," no way for us to make use of our lives, nothing that we could go so far as to stake our lives on.

## DAYS OF WILD ENTHUSIASM AND THEIR END ("IT'S THE SAME AS THE LDP. THAT'S NOT PUNK!")

That's how I became active in an organization that extolled anti-American patriotism. America was a great enemy. America, which killed Japanese people like worms during the war and trampled all over Japan after the war. We stood on the streets, proclaiming that because of America, Japanese people have lost their pride. I also learned "the Yasukuni view of history that they don't teach you in school." Thinking that maybe the whole reason I was suffering was because I had received a mistaken postwar education and had been raised with mistaken values, the Yasukuni view of history penetrated deep inside me. After all, everything I had been taught in school—everything that




the adults around me said—was just a big lie. I didn't want anything to do with a set of values in which something like the stagnation of the economy could so easily be lied about. I wanted something more certain, something more absolute that I could believe in. From the bottom of my heart. "Something" that wouldn't change no matter how much the Nikkei might fall, no matter how many banks might crash.

Within the organization we formed a patriotic punk band; we raised a Japanese flag when we performed and sang the Japanese national anthem. During our live shows, audience members couldn't enter or leave the house. It enriched me. Having been nothing but a freeter who got paid around 900 yen an hour, I became confident that this was a group that could change society. I was no longer my old powerless self. I was also no longer "unneeded."

However, in 1999 at age twenty-four, in my second year of membership, I quit the organization. The year before that, in July 1998, Kobayashi Yoshinori's book *Sensōron* was released. It was a theory of war that glorified that war and portrayed the kamikaze and other special attack corps courageously. For me, who had been raised on *Gōsen*, the fact that this book had been published was the ultimate proof that I was right. In fact, it also became the talk of the organization, and we all chatted together about how great *Sensōron* was. It felt like the era had finally caught up with us. It felt like a favorable wind had started to blow our way. We were not wrong. We, who had found patriotic ideas in the wasteland after the bubble burst, were right. And we knew it because Kobayashi had found the same thing.

But before long, my enthusiasm wore off. Seeing that other young people around me, especially those who didn't belong to right-wing organizations, were also enthusiastic about *Sensōron* planted a small seed of doubt within me. One person said that he wanted to die like the special attack corps. That's how badly he wanted to be needed. The fact that someone would say such words demonstrated the extent to which we were *not* needed by society in any civilized way. Why, in this era that people called peace, did we have this longing to be like the suicide corps? That was the extent to which we'd been robbed of an important "something." I knew that much. But I didn't know what came next.

In 1999, the National Flag and Anthem Acts were formulated. I had a vague sense that, step by step, the world that we were hoping for was actually drawing near. It felt uncomfortable. For us there was meaning in insisting on patriotism, as the antithesis of being absolute minorities, but when it came to

promoting the state and seeing those policies actually carried out, I thought something seemed wrong. Then I also realized that I was dependent on the ideology. Maybe I was depending on it in order to deceive myself that I wasn't suffering? When I considered that, I quit the organization. The patriotic punk band also broke up around the same time. After all, how could a punk band that asserts the same things as the LDP[13] even be considered punk?

## A HARD LOOK AT "SUFFERING" IN A SOCIETY THAT IS BECOMING RIGHTIST

Even though I left the right-wing organization, there are still rightist-thinking young people around me. One point that is obviously different now is that, while my enemy was America, their enemies are China, South Korea, and North Korea. One person commented that "the Chinese are stealing our jobs." Another person said that her eyes were opened to patriotic sentiment after the factory where she was working was moved to China and she lost her job.

Hearing stories like that has recently made me remember something. Among the members of the organization I was in, there was one person who had occasion to work with Chinese and Koreans at his worksite. It was hard manual work. And I myself had once experienced a fear of "Korean labor."

It happened when I was twenty-two; I had already joined Totsugekitai. At that time, I made about 1200 yen an hour working at a *sunakku*.[14] One of the girls from the place had quit, and when they started talking about hiring a new girl, the suggestion of hiring a Korean came up. The madam said something to the effect of, "Actually, I'd prefer a Japanese, but recently sales are falling, so a Korean that I can hire cheaply is better." Also, she said that there were a lot of pretty Korean girls, and that the customers teach the girls Japanese and the girls teach the customers Korean, so they often become popular with the clients. She continued like that, talking and sighing, "The pay rate is expensive for Japanese." I felt like something about me had been totally rejected. I felt as though I had been told, "Considering how useless they are, the pay rate is expensive for Japanese." I didn't know if I should feel apologetic or what I should feel. However, "a Korean girl that can be hired cheaply" was a threat to me at the time. I still remember that feeling of being trapped in a desperate situation. In the end, a Japanese was hired, and no Korean girl joined the staff. But if I had lost my job because of the appeal of Korean girls' cheap wages, would I have still fixed my number one "enemy" as America?

No matter how I tried, there were so many things I couldn't express well in words. I felt like the language that could explain this situation for me did not exist within right-wing ideology. I mean, even if they put the blame on Korea and China, maybe the enemy is to be found in a totally different place. In a world overwhelmed by globalization and dominated by a planet-wide ideology of survival of the fittest, I was experiencing competition at the lowest echelons of this country. Knowing nothing.

That is exactly the reason why, when young people like the "Net right wing"[15] put the blame on Korea or China, I thought about what their everyday lives must be like. Maybe that everyday was a war zone where they were being forced to fight on the lowest rungs of international competition, without hope. Recently I heard the story of a guy who worked day-labor temp jobs. He said that at the site, if you couldn't do your job, somebody who appeared to be Chinese would say "he can't do it" and you would be transferred to a different type of work. At scrap employment jobs, unskilled day laborers are taking orders from on-site foreign workers. How many people really know that this is the real state of affairs all over this country?

As for those days when I had nothing but the element of being Japanese with which to affirm myself, I don't want to dismiss that as the responsibility of some past self. However, a lot of people identified as leftists sneer at the opinions of people who become rightists, and sometimes simply berate them and make no effort to listen to them. I want people to open their ears and hear what's being said. Whether we are seeking it or not, I'm sure that there is definitely something in there that has been "lost."

## Notes

All notes are by the translator.

1. *Atarashii kamisama* (The new god), dir. Tsuchiya Yutaka (1999), DVD (Uplink, 2001); *Peep "TV" Show,* dir. Tsuchiya Yutaka (2004), DVD (Facets, 2006).

2. Kobayashi Takiji, *Kani kōsen* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 2008); translated by Frank Motofuji in *"The Factory Ship" and "The Absentee Landlord"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).

3. Norma Field, "Commercial Appetite and Human Need: The Accidental and Fated Revival of Kobayashi Takiji's *Cannery Ship," The Asia-Pacific Journal,* newsletter 8, item 8, 2009 (February 22, 2009), http://old.japanfocus.org/_Norma_Field-Commercial_Appetite_and_Human_Need__The_Accidental_and_Fated_Revival_of_Kobayashi_Takiji_s_Cannery_Ship (accessed June 8, 2009).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. *Iki jigoku tengoku* (Living hell heaven) (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 2000); *Jisatsu no kosuto* (The cost of suicide) (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 2002); *Aku no Sūjiku o tazunete* (Visiting the Axis of Evil) (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 2003).

7. Amamiya Karin, "Ikitzurasa ga koesaseru 'sayū' no kakine: Baburu no hōkaigo no 'yakenohara' nite," in *Migi to hidari wa te o musuberu ka* (Can the left and right join hands?), *Rosujene / Lost Generation,* May 2008: 44–53.

8. The Japanese term "freeter" (*furiitaa*) comes from the English word *free* combined with the German word *Arbeiter,* meaning a part-time worker. The term is used in Japanese to refer to people without stable jobs, such as job-hopping part-time or temporary employees.

9. NEET is an abbreviation for "Not currently engaged in Employment, Education, or Training."

10. *Bōsōzoku* refers to Japanese youth motorcycle gangs.

11. OL, or "office lady," refers to young women, typically unmarried, who tend to do pink collar work at offices and are considered likely to quit, or be pressured to quit, after marriage or childbirth.

12. *Gōmanizumu sengen* is a manga series by Kobayashi Yoshinori. The title could be translated into English as "declaration of arrogance."

13. The Liberal Democratic Party is Japan's largest political party, which has ruled for the vast majority of time since its founding in 1955.

14. A *sunakku* (from "snack") is one type of casual hostess bar.

15. "Net right wing" refers to people whose right-wing activities are conducted primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, over the Internet.

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KATHRYN DUNLAP AND CARISSA WOLF

# Fans Behaving Badly: Anime Metafandom, Brutal Criticism, and the Intellectual Fan

In September 2005, a fanfiction writer posted a story featuring the main characters from the popular anime series *InuYasha* on adultfanfiction.net, an open fanfiction community featuring adult-themed stories. The reviews of the story were overwhelmingly positive until one very distressed reviewer demanded that the story, a graphic rape, carry a warning label for such content. Supporters of the writer attacked the reviewer and the writer denied that the story contained rape, suggesting that at the very most it was "non-consensual sex." The back-and-forth bickering continued and the supporters of the writer continued to post increasingly more elaborate praise and support. Eventually, however, the discussion would have run its course and the textual remnants of this digital fight would have faded into the background static of the Internet, save for the efforts of the Fandom Wank community.

The community motto of Fandom Wank, "because we think 'Fandom is Fucking Funny' isn't taking it far enough," might say a great deal about the central ideals of this community, but we wondered what might be the implications of the existence of such a community, what purpose it might serve and what significance it might have. Furthermore, we see this as an opportunity to explore practices of anime fan culture using the theory of Matt Hills

in a way that does not compromise the intellectual significance of those practices based on academic presuppositions of what does, or does not, qualify as intelligent discourse.

## FANDOM WANK

Fandom Wank (FW) is hosted on a journal-style community, JournalFen, similar to the more popular livejournal.com, in which members gather to engage in a form of active criticism, a process they call "pointing and laughing," at recent examples of "wank" in a wide variety of fandoms, anime and otherwise. Though it conspicuously references the British slang, wank is defined by the FW community as "self-aggrandizing posturing, fannish absurdities, circular ego-stroking, endless flamewars, [and] pseudointellectual definitions."[1] In general, wank is part of the less-than-polite interactions that are relatively commonplace when there is any sort of anonymity online.

DESPITE THE UNUSUALLY CAUSTIC NATURE OF THE WANKAS' PRACTICES, CERTAIN EMERGING PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR AND A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATIONAL WIKI SUGGEST THAT THESE TEXTUAL PRACTICES MAY BE MUCH MORE COMPLICATED THEN A FIRST GLANCE MIGHT INDICATE.

As of this writing, FW has more than 5000 members, who call themselves "wankas," and has produced thousands of posts dedicated to mocking wank and wankers (people who create wank).[2] The community practices of FW are relatively straightforward. Members of the community post well-developed "wank reports," which define the context and the specifics of the particular example of wank the poster is reporting on, while providing amusing commentary and pointing out humorous quotes. The wankas then proceed to mock the wank mercilessly, often using harsh language, insults, and inside jokes.

Despite the unusually caustic nature of the wankas' practices, certain emerging patterns of behavior and a comprehensive informational wiki suggest that these textual practices may be much more complicated then a first glance might indicate. The engagement of the wankas in these metafandom practices suggests a level of critical textual analysis that would not be out of place in an educational setting, despite their rude language and humor. This reminded us of Matt Hills's work studying fan cultures, more specifically his concept of the fan-as-intellectual. Hills argued in his 2002 book *Fan Cultures*

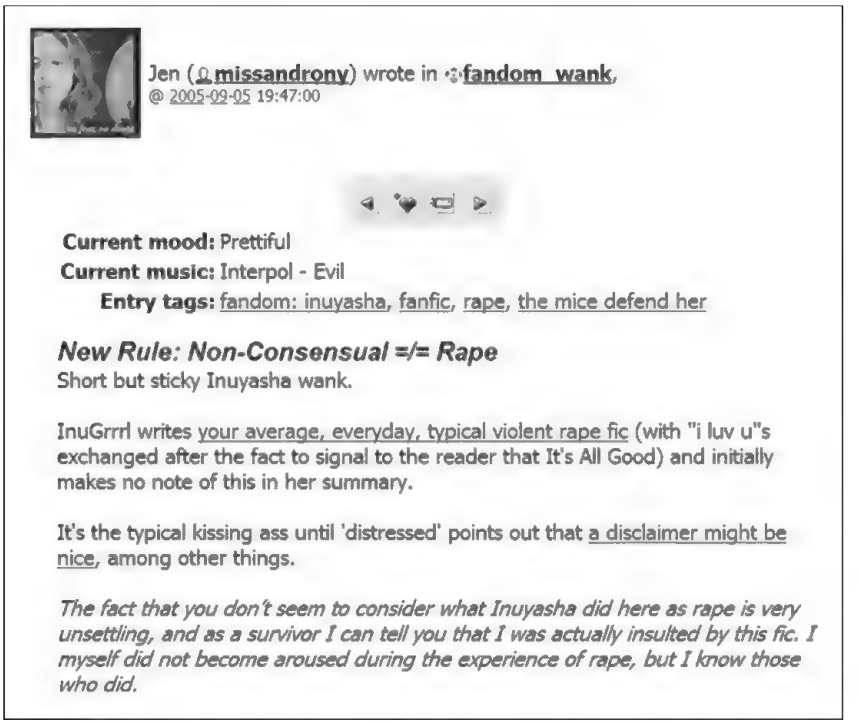

Jen (missandrony) wrote in fandom_wank,
@ 2005-09-05 19:47:00
Current mood: Prettiful
Current music: Interpol - Evil
Entry tags: fandom: inuyasha, fanfic, rape, the mice defend her
New Rule: Non-Consensual =/= Rape
Short but sticky Inuyasha wank.
InuGrrrl writes your average, everyday, typical violent rape fic (with "i luv u"s exchanged after the fact to signal to the reader that It's All Good) and initially makes no note of this in her summary.
It's the typical kissing ass until 'distressed' points out that a disclaimer might be nice, among other things.
The fact that you don't seem to consider what Inuyasha did here as rape is very unsettling, and as a survivor I can tell you that I was actually insulted by this fic. I myself did not become aroused during the experience of rape, but I know those who did.

**FIGURE 1.** Screen capture of September 9, 2005, Fandom Wank post.

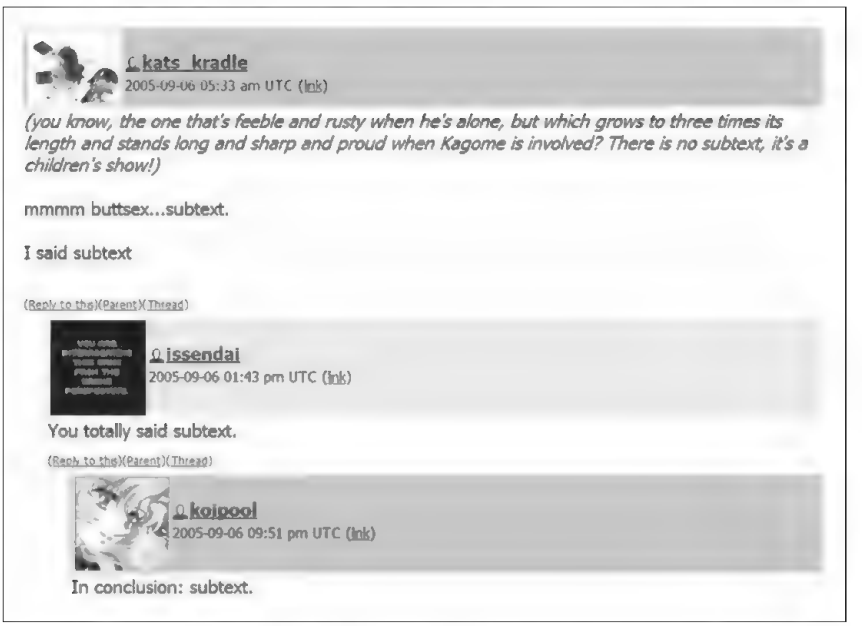

kats_kradle
2005-09-06 05:33 am UTC (link)
(you know, the one that's feeble and rusty when he's alone, but which grows to three times its length and stands long and sharp and proud when Kagome is involved? There is no subtext, it's a children's show!)
mmmm buttsex...subtext.
I said subtext
(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)
issendai
2005-09-06 01:43 pm UTC (link)
You totally said subtext.
(Reply to this)(Parent)(Thread)
koipool
2005-09-06 09:51 pm UTC (link)
In conclusion: subtext.

**FIGURE 2.** Screen capture of comment exchange in September 2005 Fandom Wank post.

that fan-studies scholars are too fixated on shaping their perceptions of fan practices to resemble those of academia instead of studying authentic fan practices.[3] Hills created the concept of the fan-as-intellectual to encourage scholars in fan studies to accept that intellectual practices can occur outside of institutionalized settings, particularly within new-media settings. This study aims to demonstrate that community-building practices aimed at bettering communications within the community are occurring, indicating fan-as-intellectual practices. To accomplish this we will be examining two wank reports and their subsequent comments, all featuring the wank of one *InuYasha* fanfiction writer of dubious judgment and her fans.

## FANDOM STUDIES AND ANIME

Fandom studies are complex, and two significant theorists in the field, Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills, have both proposed interesting theories of fan practice. While fan studies have been part of academic research for decades, most current discussions on the nature of fandom and fan communities can be traced back to Henry Jenkins's book *Textual Poachers.*[4] Since its publication in 1992, *Textual Poachers* and Jenkins himself have come to be key reference points for academic studies of fans. Jenkins developed the concept of the scholar-fan to both explain his own relationship to the work that he was doing and to explore what responsibilities academics have to their subjects. In *Textual Poachers,* Jenkins also lays out a critical framework with which to theorize the practices of fans and consider the culture of fandom. Jenkins does this largely by connecting the fan practices to a subversive consumerism that allows fans to actively participate in their own entertainment media and create a cultural space that more actively serves their interests.

Jenkins is, however, not without critics. Matt Hills has become one of Jenkins's most vocal detractors and Hills and Jenkins are well aware of their antithetical relationship within academic circles. They published a conversation that they recorded without an audience and behind closed doors at the 2001 "Console-ing Passions" conference on gender and television studies. While the version of the conversation Jenkins presents in a 2006 collection of his work, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers,* tends toward discussing the problematic positioning of separating out "good" and "bad" fans, some of the fundamental differences between their views are evident.[5] These differences are even more pronounced in Hills's book, *Fan Cultures,* first published just a year after this conversation in 2002.

Matt Hills does not hesitate to situate his theories and practices outside of more traditional views of fandom culture. Hills is critical of Jenkins's scholar-fan concept and suggests that the idea of the scholar-fan perpetuates two problematic tendencies in fan studies: the valorization of rational academic discourses over actual fandom practices and the need to organize models of discourse along academic conventions. Because of this need by academics to force fandom into an academic model, a forced dualism is created of "good" and "bad" fan practices. This academically created bias, often unintentional, regarding "bad" discursive practices results in the marginalization of anime and other dominantly Internet-based fan cultures.

To offer alternative views of this problematic model of fan studies, Hills creates the concept of the fan-as-intellectual and suggests that fans engage in intellectual processes far outside the realm of academics in ways that show little resemblance to comparable academic practices. Hills believes one of the major shortcomings of scholastic inquiry into fan culture is the inability to recognize many of the intellectual processes that take place on a regular basis within fan culture, as these practices often do not fall into traditional patterns of knowledge making.[6] Because academics value their own judgment systems over those of their areas of study, both the groups, scholars and fans, conflict ideologically. Hills believes that we need not be afraid of academic practices moving out of the "institution" and into the hands of fandom practitioners.

Observations on the nature of Western anime fan practices are found in Susan Napier's article, "The World of Anime Fandom in America" in the first volume of *Mechademia*.[7] In that article, Napier studied the members of the Miyazaki Mailing List (MML) and their practices and found that they also expected good netiquette even through most of the list members were male. This suggests both that "nice girls" and "nice fans" do not flame and that this practice can be translated, in some small way, to American anime fandom. However, Napier also acknowledges some of the limits of her work, noting that members of the MML were on the whole better educated and older than what one might expect in other online anime fan communities. This leaves an opening to examine the dark underbelly of anime fandom in America as a response to Napier's well-constructed, but only partial, picture. In the second volume of *Mechademia,* Meredith Suzanne Hahn Aquila also explores anime fandom in America through the conventions of fan culture.[8] She examines the *Ranma ½* fanfiction community and how adherences to conventions within that community are valued.

## OUR POSITION AS RESEARCHERS

As both Jenkins and Hills suggest, it is important to understand where researchers stand in relationship to the fan culture they study, and good research practices demand we make our potential biases clear. The best way to describe us is to acknowledge that we are academics and at the same time anime fans. Between us, we have fourteen years of experience as fans and have both at various points been active in college anime clubs and Internet fandom. In fact, it is through one online fandom that was involved in a particularly "epic" wank that we even became aware of FW. Furthermore, in the studies of anime fan culture, we found that the recorded practices explored only certain elements of what it means to be a fan but did not fully encompass our lived experiences within anime fandom.

Our position as academic researchers is therefore one of familiar observers; we have an understanding of fandom and fan practices and were familiar with wank even before we had a definition for it. But we have never participated in the FW community, aside from some snickers at particularly insightful comments. We are neither wankers nor wankas, but we are participants in the culture of anime fandom. We also had to keep in mind our investment in fan practices and how we might desire to paint a favorable picture of fan culture, specifically in this case, a favorable picture of the FW community.

In order to address these potential biases we largely relied on FW's own definitions of their terms and practices. We turned to their complex and well-organized community wiki. Because of the polarizing nature of certain dominant modes of language use within the FW community, it is important to consider fan practices divorced from additional interferences based on "bad" or explicit language. A more quantifiable-based research, including the use of discreet quantifiable units of language identified through the memes listed on the FW wiki, helped to distance us as researchers from possible bias based on this harsh language.

## FANDOM WANK WIKI

Beyond the electronic journal style community itself, FW members have created a massive and detailed wiki that looks and operates like Wikipedia.[9] Although members have to register in order to edit the wiki, membership is open and at the time of this writing there are just over 1700 members who have produced 3000 pages (including stubs and redirects) since November

2005.[10] Through this wiki, new users are able to search through infamous wanks, understand community history, discuss key wankers and wankas, and, perhaps most importantly, access the definitions of frequent phrases, favorite insults, memes, and even a Fandom Wank dictionary. This organizational structure easily lent itself to a study of anime metafandom practices because of its self-definitional nature.

THESE ELEMENTS OF ORGANIZATION ALONG SPECIFIC GROUP BELIEFS SUGGEST A CERTAIN LEVEL OF COMMUNITY FORMATION, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON UNIFICATION UNDER CORE VALUES.

The wiki also serves to organize the FW Jurisimprudence, which outlines the laws to which FW ascribes, including the famous Godwin's law, many of which they have theorized and tested on one of FW's many sister journal communities. Jurisimprudence even has a separate wiki in which the laws, their addenda, and corollaries total more than three hundred entries.[11] On the FW wiki, that number has been trimmed to forty-nine.[12] The Jurisimprudence list serves a vital function to us as outsiders to the community because it defines the behaviors and arguments that the wankas have deemed to be without justification in any circumstance.

For example, Godwin's law, created by American attorney Mike Godwin in 1990, states that, "As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1."[13] Godwin's law is not actually considered a Jurisimprudence law as it did not originate in FW, but several corollaries have been added by FW. The importance of this law for the wankas inspired a "Nothing is like the Nazis" rule that warns people from ever comparing anything (save Nazis) to Nazis. These elements of organization along specific group beliefs suggest a certain level of community formation, with an emphasis on unification under core values. However, online communities form via different properties than their offline equivalents, as Demitri Williams suggests in his research into online social capital. In his article, "The Impact of Time Online: Social Capital and Cyberbalkanization,"[14] Williams suggests that online social capital provides more boundary-crossing experiences than offline counterparts, suggesting the exact opposite of cyberbalkanization, but the experiences themselves are not as deep or fulfilling as the offline equivalent.

In the quest to create more fulfilling or deep experiences in online spaces, community formation requires members to create accurate and meaningful textual versions of themselves that can interact within the community. In FW and its associated wiki, usernames and participation in discursive practices are designed to provide this community experience. Alan Aycock codes

four modes of behaviors that self-disclose personal information and help to create interpersonal connection in his article "Technologies of the Self."[15] He suggests that, among other features, degree and kind of commitment plays an important role in connecting individuals in an online community. While it is possible to just explicitly state this information, a user can also demonstrate commitment to a community by learning and using the specific lingo that the group uses. The FW wiki was designed for exactly this purpose.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This research project tests two main hypotheses. First, if FW practices according to its own group values, then it forms a secondary intellectual discourse with which to evaluate the fandoms that compose their primary discourse communities. Second, through the use of memetics, which we can identify and codify, we can differentiate the inside/outside forms of discourse found in FW, thus suggesting patterns under which they organize their discourse. In this context, we define memes as individual repeated phrases or concepts that develop as part of the community lexicon.

Gary Marshall in his article "The Internet and Memetics" presents a way to measure the organization of an online group, or specific individual within that group, by studying the operational memes.[16] Memes are different forms of repeated text, code, or other patterns, but user-level memes are most significant for this study. These memes circulate quickly and play a significant role within online communities, each with cultural and social capital. Communities with vast memberships like the FW community create memes specific to their members, some that they identify themselves as memes and some that they categorize as slang, definitions, or in-jokes but that otherwise share the same function within community practices.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND APPLICATION

After sorting through the lists of common phrases, terms, and memes provided by the FW wiki, and through cursory glances of their discussion threads, we observed three primary features of FW discourse: comments dedicated to improving discussion, maintaining self-organization, and affirming community identification. Within these primary categories, the memetic behavior

tended to further subdivide into smaller subfeatures. To better differentiate between each subfeature, we defined the nature of each and listed examples, as shown in Figure 3.

Through this breakdown of discourse and memetics, the forms of fandom discussion begin to emerge, and the data can begin to be coded. Such quantitative coding helps us test our initial hypothesis, but in order to address the second hypothesis we also recorded the targets of FW comments—the "wankers" (outsiders committing the wank) and "wankas" (FW community insiders).

In addition to the quantifiable research, we examined specific posts/comments and wordings, employing textual analysis to help reveal some of the underlying intentions of the commenters and the community itself. This allowed us to account for most important trends that might not be initially observable through our data set, as well as some general patterns of discussion.

| FEATURES | SUBFEATURES | DEFINITIONS |
|---|---|---|
| Improving Discussion | Limitations | Directing the discussion away from certain topics<br>• "This is not racism wank" |
| | Textual Criticism | Analyzing the logic or phrasing in a post or comment to find errors or points of insight<br>• "tl;dr" (too long, didn't read)<br>• "Interrogating from the wrong perspective" |
| | References to Theories and Laws | Invoking various informal laws<br>• Godwin's law<br>• Ockham's razor |
| Self-organizing Activities | Insults | Direct verbal attacks<br>• Common catfighting cunt<br>• fanbrat |
| | Behavioral Comments | Criticizing actions taken or mentioned<br>• Internet lawyers<br>• BNF (Big Name Fan) |
| Community Identification | Inside Jokes/Lingo | Jokes and phrases that likely originated on FW (based on Web site information)<br>• Bartending in the dark<br>• "But what are your thoughts on yaoi?" |
| | Miscellaneous Labels | Labels that do not easily fit into other categories<br>• Anonymouse (anonymous)<br>• "Pit of voles" (referring to fanfiction.net) |

**FIGURE 3.** Features of discussion.

## SAMPLE

Because FW is a multifandom community with thousands of members and thousands of posts, we narrowed our research to one specific fandom: that which relates to the *InuYasha* anime and manga series by Takahashi Rumiko. The anime series has been a long-time staple of Cartoon Network's *Adult Swim* late-night block of adult animated shows, and it is one of the most well-known anime series in America, with an equally large fan base, therefore making it an appropriate subject area as somewhat representative of American anime fan culture.

We further narrowed our focus to studying two specific posts found on FW in late 2005 and early 2006. These posts circulate about a specific "wanker" and operate much like chapters in a continuing saga, thus minimizing the need for addressing background issues. The instances of wank themselves feel very familiar to us as long-time observers, and occasional participants, of anime fandom and therefore represent larger anime fan practices. Furthermore, these posts are a few years old, so the discussion has stabilized and ended, with no new comments.[17]

## RESULTS

In this project, we studied the introductory report of the primary wanker on September 5, 2005, and another incident posted on April 3, 2006. The September post contains 558 comments, yielding 85 recorded memes, and the April post contained 315 total comments, with 152 recorded memes. Some of those memes were found within the same comments and some comments did not contain either memes or other information pertinent to this study.

AS FW MEMBERS ATTACK THOSE COMMITTING "WANK" OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY, THEY TAKE SOME STEPS TO ORGANIZE THEIR BEHAVIOR TO MINIMIZE INTERNAL SQUABBLES.

Of the three primary features, behaviors of community identification were observed most often with 108 out of the cumulative total 237 memes recorded (45.6 percent), as shown in Table 1. The remainder was split between improving discussion and self-organizing activities (28.7 percent and 25.7 percent respectively). The most predominant subfeatures were comments of textual criticism (26.5 percent), insults (16 percent), and inside jokes/lingo (24.9 percent).[18]

**TABLE 1.** Memetic Responses in Fandom Wank Posts

| Features | To Wankers | | To Wankas | | Combined | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq. | % of $N_1$ | Freq. | % of $N_2$ | Freq. | % of $N$ |
| Improving Discussion | 43 | 31.1 | 25 | 25.2 | 68 | 28.7 |
| Limitations | 1 | 0.7 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0.04 |
| Textual Criticism | 39 | 28.2 | 24 | 24.2 | 63 | 26.5 |
| Reference to Theories and Laws | 3 | 2.2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1.3 |
| Self-Organizing Activities | 54 | 39.1 | 7 | 7.1 | 61 | 25.7 |
| Insults | 37 | 26.8 | 1 | 1 | 38 | 16 |
| Behavioral Comments | 17 | 12.3 | 6 | 6.1 | 23 | 9.7 |
| Community Identification | 41 | 29.7 | 67 | 67.7 | 108 | 45.6 |
| Insides Jokes/Lingo | 32 | 23.2 | 27 | 27.2 | 59 | 24.9 |
| Miscellaneous Labels | 9 | 6.5 | 40 | 40.4 | 49 | 20.1 |
| **Totals** | **$N_1$ =138** | | **$N_2$ = 99** | | **$N$ = 237** | |

## DISCUSSION

In studying the memetics of FW online discussions, distinct trends seem to point to an intellectualized fan community that improves the quality of discussion by aggressively attacking poor or weak arguments (i.e., those that feature poor logic, lack of entertaining factors, and violate FW's own preestablished guidelines). Furthermore, as FW members attack those committing "wank" outside the community, they take some steps to organize their behavior to minimize internal squabbles, even going so far as to briefly educate their members on the proper use of language and logic in constructing arguments.

As we analyze our findings, we acknowledge that both Jenkins and Hills have made room in academic discussions for a variety of conversations about fandom and the role of fan practices within subcultures. Angelina I. Karpovich, in her article "The Audience as Editor,"[19] examined the unique role of beta-readers—fans who act as test audience and editor in one—in fanfiction communities using elements from both Jenkins and Hills to support her arguments about the community-building relationship surrounding these

ASIDE FROM TEXTUAL CRITICISM, FW MEMBERS ALSO ENGAGE IN SELF-ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES TO KEEP MEMBERS UNITED AGAINST WANKERS.

fan practices. This expression of collaboration seeps into other areas of fan culture beyond the creation of fanfiction and is clearly evident in the organized FW practices we observed.

Much of FW's focus seems to be on textual criticism specifically analyzing the wording or logic of wankers' comments and exposing the faultiness of the wank. Over a quarter of the total recorded memes (26.5 percent) were dedicated to the textual analysis of fandom arguments and discussion, looking both outward to wankers and inward at FW members. In the April post, the wanker who had previously been the subject of a FW wank report discovered that one of her fanfiction stories had been plagiarized. In retaliation, the wanker summoned her fans to attack the plagiarist and lodge numerous complaints to the Web site that hosted the fanfiction. FW members admitted the story had been plagiarized but criticized more the wanker's method of retaliation. Many of the FW comments directly quoted the wanker, then dissected the wording to expose the wanker's weaknesses. When the wanker throws insults at the plagiarist, a FW member chastises her for not using proper spelling in her insults:

> [Wanker:] *those that take good things, and then remake then for their own benifit, aka EVIL MAIPULITIVE BITCHY SLACKERS.*
> [Wanka's response:] 1) Assuming you meant "manipulative", who the hell is she manipulating? 2) On second thought, maybe you meant "nail polishing"?

In the same comment, the wanka remarks on the lack of creativity shown in the wanker's comments, namely the repetition of the same word. This quote and response demonstrates another trademark characteristic of the FW community: to criticize and comment for personal amusement, not to fulfill an academic goal. As a result, their comments are often sarcastic or mocking and frequently are meant to show the wanker as an attention seeker or fool.

FW members will also criticize each other's comments and use of language, but less aggressively than as is demonstrated toward wankers. Of total memes used towards wankas, 24.2 percent focused on textual analysis and criticism. One wanka, a recent member judging by the nature of responses, asked why plagiarism of fanfiction, which is by its very nature infringing on copyrights, is bad when the authors know the fics are not entirely original material. Other wankas rose against this member, but when the member explained that the questions are only for clarification, the wankas hold back

and explain the situation. This explanation digresses into a lengthy side thread on the details of plagiarism, copyright, and the purposes of fanfiction, thus demonstrating that the wankas want to educate as much they criticize. Furthermore, in the September post one wanka typed "viral" when she had meant "virile," thus leading to some gentle teasing and a tangent about *InuYasha* with Ebola.

Part of this textual criticism might stem from the sense of distance that FW members place between themselves and their fandoms as metafandom critics. Wankas do not solely define their fandom tendencies within the realm of a particular fandom; some of those commenting are fans of *InuYasha* specifically, most of anime in general. One frequently recorded form of textual criticism in both posts was the variation of "Get out of my fandom, you make my fandom look stupid,"[20] where the wankas could see how an outsider's perception of a wanker's behavior might reflect poorly on the fandom at large. Specifically, one FW wanka states, "this wank makes me happy in that sad sort of 'but . . . but it's my fandom so it's good but it's wank so it's bad' sort of way." This wanka is torn between two emotions—enjoyment at the attention given to a beloved fandom and sadness that this occurred through wank.

Aside from textual criticism, FW members also engage in self-organizing activities to keep members united against wankers. Most frequently they use insults to attack wankers, especially when wankers demonstrate certain ego-fluffing behaviors. This emphasis on insults defies conventional belief in the niceties of online fan relationships, especially among women. Riannon Bury, in her book *Cyberspaces of Their Own,* examines the role of fan communities in the lives of female fans and one article, "Nice Girls Don't Flame,"[21] implies that relations to fan discursive practices and community collaboration are based in conventional American middle-class etiquette. These practices are used to mitigate conflict or prevent it altogether by qualifying statements and carefully guard against any textual affront, which was precisely the opposite of what we discovered.

All but one insult were aimed at those outside the community, reaffirming FW's subtle "us vs. them" dichotomy. In the April post, the wanker believed she was famous enough to have legions of fans supporting her and called on these fans to attack the plagiarist. Wankas on FW referred to these fans as "fanpoodles," thus insulting both the fans and the wanker by demoting these fans to insignificant noisemakers. The term "fanpoodles" was used twice in the April post but was repeated frequently in the subsequent post, creating a meme directly associated with these related wank incidents. Many wankas theorized that this cry of plagiarism was the wanker's attempt at

automatic sympathy, and one wanka said this means "a growth not only of her fathead but her legion of fanpoodles." Other wankas suggested there was no real plagiarism; that instead the wanker had constructed an alias, known by wankas as a "sockpuppet,"[22] and reposted the fanfiction under that alias for attention.

The one instance when an insult was used toward a fellow wanka occurred when a wank broke the most important rule of self-organization: "what happens on Fandom Wank stays on Fandom Wank."[23] FW members strive to keep their actions secret from those who are the subject of their mocking and to remain completely uninvolved, lest FW be accused of promoting trolling—aggressively rude comments and actions toward others. However in the April post, one wanka admitted they reported the plagiarized story and other wankas criticized that person for it. "Really, what part of 'point and mock' you do not get? Reporting the fic = BAD," said one wanka. Wankas most commonly unite to mock the wanker but are not afraid to check other FW members when they step out of line.

Lastly, FW wankas use insides jokes/lingo and miscellaneous labels to reaffirm their alliances among each other and against the wanker, thus solidifying community identification. Of memes aimed at wankers outside the community, 23.2 percent came in the form of inside jokes and lingo, and of the wanka-to-wanka memes, the most prevalent (40.4 percent) appeared as miscellaneous labels, to further distinguish between insider and outsider discourse. In the April post, the most frequent label referred to "BNF" or "Big Name Fan." A BNF is someone who is well known in the fandom and on FW for committing frequent wank.[24] Once the BNF reaches a certain level of perceived infamy among wankas, that BNF gets her or his own page on the FW wiki. In the April post, wankas frequently made reference to a particular BNF and compared the actions of the current wanker with the previous actions of this particular BNF. When one wanka suggested the current wanker have her own page on the FW wiki, another wanka responded: "[this wanker] is bad and all, but she hasn't surpassed [the BNF] in the ego department."

## CONCLUSIONS

While our quantifiable research into the metafandom practices of the FW community demonstrated several emerging patterns, there is still a great deal of examination that is necessary before we can make any solid claims about the nature of the community and its members. It is becoming clear,

however, that wankas do practice activities that appear to be at least partially intellectually motivated. As Matt Hills suggested, it is difficult for those operating within an academic institution to recognize fans-as-intellectuals because of biases toward what are "good" and "bad" fan practices.

ALL FAN PRACTICES, EVEN THOSE WITH NO INTELLECTUAL VALUE WHATSOEVER AND AMOUNT TO LITTLE MORE THAN INANE VERBAL SPEW, ARE WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION.

As current academics who grew up as digital natives within a volatile landscape of anime fan culture, we would even suggest taking it one step further. All fan practices, even those with no intellectual value whatsoever and amount to little more than inane verbal spew, are worthy of consideration. The practices of the young and highly networked are representative of the forefront of electronic textual discourse, informatics, and aesthetics.

While we are unlikely to personally call others "assholish motherfuckers" as part of an academic discussion anytime soon, nor would we encourage others to adopt this as a common verbal idiom, we cannot deny the importance of profanity as part of a system of language use. Anime fans are not all strange otaku or frustratingly embarrassing weeaboos,[25] but as long-time fans ourselves, we cannot deny that anime fans have a touch of mania about them. That this would spill over into language use in fan culture is hardly a "stop-the-presses" realization. The future of fan-culture studies must be prepared to look at realistic fan practices and not cherry-pick based on ideological structures of academia. It might not be pretty or always leave us feeling positive about fan culture, but for anime fans and our understanding of them, these are invaluable studies into the reality of their lived experiences.

## Notes

1. "Fandom Wank," JournalFen blog, http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank (accessed April 6, 2009).

2. "Fandom Wank Community Information," JournalFen information page, http://www.journalfen.net/userinfo.bml?user=fandom_wank (accessed April 6, 2009).

3. Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

4. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

5. Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

6. Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 5–9.

7. Susan Napier, "The World of Anime Fandom in America," *Mechademia* 1 (2006): 47–64.

8. Meredith Suzanne Hahn Aquila, "*Ranma ½* Fanfiction Writers: New Narrative Themes of the Same Old Story?" *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 34–48.

9. "Fandom Wank Wiki," Wiki Web site, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php (accessed April 6, 2009).

10. "Fandom Wank Wiki Statistics," Fandom Wank Wiki page, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Special:Statistics (accessed April 6, 2009).

11. "Jurisimprudence," Wikispaces Web site, http://jurisimprudence.wikispaces.com (accessed April 6, 2009).

12. "Category: Jurisimprudence Laws," Fandom Wank Wiki page, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Category:Jurisimprudence_laws (accessed April 6, 2009).

13. "Godwin's Law," Fandom Wank Wiki page, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Godwin%27s_Law (accessed April 6, 2009).

14. Demitri Williams, "The Impact of Time Online: Social Capital and Cyberbalkanization," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 10, no. 3 (2007): 398–406.

15. Alan Aycock, "Technologies of the Self: Foucault and Internet Discourse," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1, no. 2 (1995): http://jcmc.indiana.edu/.

16. Gary Marshall, "The Internet and Memetics," *Proceedings of the 15th International Congress of Cybernetics* (Namur, Belgium), 443–48.

17. Data collection consisted of collaborative assessment of discussion threads on FW. We analyzed each thread together and collaboratively determined what memes were present, how the memes were used, and to whom they are aimed, either at the wankers or among the members of FW. In testing two hypotheses, the data analysis was a two-fold process. First, we analyzed whether FW makes use of community-identifying markers, thus indicating that they are a self-organizing discourse community. Second, we compared the frequency of comments directed toward wankas (those within the community) versus wankers (those whom the community is ridiculing). This sort of quantitative analysis should indicate whether FW actively practices their community ideologies.

18. Much of the discussion was aimed at the wankers from outside the FW community—58.2 percent of all memes recorded (identified as *N1* in table 1)—the majority of which fell into the categories of textual criticism, insults, and inside jokes/lingo at the wankers' expense (28.2 percent, 26.8 percent, and 23.2 percent of *N1* totals, respectively). Of the memes used between FW members (41.7 percent of total, designated *N2*), most were distributed between the categories of textural criticism, miscellaneous labels, and inside jokes/lingo (24.2 percent, 40.4 percent and 27.2 percent of *N2* totals, respectively). In direct comparison of subfeature frequencies between targeted groups, both wankers and wankas received textual criticism, but wankers received a slightly higher percentage (28.2 percent versus 24.2 percent of respective totals). Inside jokes/lingo occurred with similar frequencies between both groups—23.2 percent of *N1* totals for wankers and 27.2 percent of *N2* totals for wankas. Insults seemed to be exclusively used against wankers (26.8 percent), while miscellaneous labels were shared mostly between wankas (40.4 percent).

19. Angelia I. Karpovich, "The Audience as Editor: The Role of Beta-Readers in Online Fan Fiction Communities," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (New York: McFarland & Company, 2006), 171–88.

20. "Get out of my fandom, you make my fandom look stupid," Fandom Wank Wiki

page, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Get_out_of_my_fandom%2C_you_make_my_fandom_look_stupid (accessed April 6, 2009).

21. Riannon Bury, "Nice Girls Don't Flame: Politeness Strategies On (the) Line," in *Cyberspaces of Their Own* (New York: Morehouse Press, 2005), 131–65.

22. "Sockpuppet," Fandom Wank Wiki page, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/Sockpuppet (accessed April 6, 2009).

23. "All Your Base," Fandom Wank Wiki page, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/All_Your_Base (accessed April 6, 2009). "Fandom Wank Community Information," JournalFen information page, http://www.journalfen.net/userinfo.bml?user=fandom_wank (accessed April 6, 2009).

24. "Big Name Fan," Fandom Wank Wiki page, http://wiki.fandomwank.com/index.php/BNF (accessed April 6, 2009).

25. English-speaking Western fans with childish obsessions of anime, J-pop music, and anything Japanese.

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LIVIA MONNET

# Anatomy of Permutational Desire: Perversion in Hans Bellmer and Oshii Mamoru

## BELLMER'S ANAGRAMMAR OF PERVERSION

Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004, *Inosensu*) traces a murder investigation conducted by two Public Security Section 9 detectives, Batou and Togusa. Hadaly 2052 gynoids—sophisticated robot dolls produced by the Locus Solus company—have murdered a series of men. Batou and Togusa eventually learn that a Locus Solus inspector tampered with the dolls' inbuilt ethics code (i.e. the Three Laws of Robotics forbidding robots to harm humans, to disobey the latter's commands, and to do violence to themselves). The gynoids embarked on their killing spree, hoping to call attention to the tragic fate of scores of young girls who had been kidnapped and handed over to Locus Solus for the purpose of "ghost dubbing"—the copying of a human being's "ghost" (consciousness, mind, soul) onto a gynoid's memory hard disk in order to render her more human-like and thus more desirable.[1]

*Inosensu* affords an animated museum of technological and artificial life forms—dolls, robots, automata, and cyborgs. But the Hadaly 2052 gynoids play the central role. Oshii drew inspiration for the gynoids' design from the Doll photographs of surrealist artist Hans Bellmer and from the exquisite

prepubescent girl dolls of Yoshida Ryō. He also curated the exhibition "Dolls of Innocence" for the Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art (February–March 2004), which focused on Bellmer's art and the Japanese art of ball-jointed dolls (*kyūtai kansetsu ningyō*).[2]

This essay has two main objectives. On the one hand, I will look at the writings of Hans Bellmer (1902–1975) to show how he offers not only a theoretical articulation specific to his work but also a general theory of perversion. On the other hand, I will show how *Inosensu* offers both an homage to, and a subversion of the German artist's vision of modern perversion. In this first part, I will examine the *anagrammar of perversion* that Bellmer articulated in *The Doll* (1963, *Die Puppe*) and other essays.[3] In subsequent parts, I will consider *Inosensu*'s remediation of Bellmer's conception of perversion, which allows the anime to produce an aesthetically and conceptually distinctive approach to perversion.

## THE DOLLS

Between 1933 and 1935, in Berlin, Bellmer created two life-size mannequins of young girls that he called Dolls or "artificial girls." The first Doll consisted of an armature of wood and metal; a torso, a head and a hand made of flax fiber coated with plaster; and of a pair of legs joined to the pelvis by wooden ball joints. The second Doll was mounted around a large, round wooden ball representing the stomach, which in turn was topped by a double pelvis whose curved base allowed for the insertion of ball joints for the legs. Called the Center of the Doll or the Torso, this piece permitted greater freedom of combination, permutation, or reconfiguration of body parts than did the first Doll. These body parts included two identical pairs of legs, two arms, a torso endowed with several breasts, and the head of the first Doll. Round wooden ball joints joined the various segments of the second Doll's body.

Bellmer produced two series of photographs of the two Dolls. Comprising about thirty photographs, the first series documented various scenarios, in which the first Doll is captured in poses evoking seduction, deprivation, violation, or sadistic punishment. The second series of photographs consisted of roughly one hundred negatives showing variations or rearrangements of the body of the second Doll. The second series developed a sense of narrative potential, with a melodramatic aura reminiscent of cheap crime movies. The sinister, enigmatic, or uncanny atmosphere of the pictures was greatly enhanced by aniline coloring evoking hand-colored postcards from the beginning of the

century and by the severely truncated, multiplied, or doubled body of the Doll.

A selection of ten photographs from the series documenting Bellmer's first Doll appeared in 1934 in a little book entitled *Die Puppe (The Doll)*. Bellmer wrote a short poetic text to accompany the pictures, "Erinnerungen zum Thema Puppe" (Memories of the doll theme), and provided a diagram of the miniature panorama to be inserted into the Doll's belly. A French translation of *Die Puppe, La Poupée,* was published in Paris by GLM in 1936. Bellmer also supervised and designed the French edition, including a two-page spread with eighteen pictures of the first Doll, which had appeared in the surrealist journal *Minotaure* (no. 6, December 1935). These publications paved the way for the French surrealists' fascinated reception of Bellmer's work.

The photos of the second Doll aroused greater enthusiasm among Bellmer's surrealist friends. The poet Paul Éluard wrote a series of prose poems based on Bellmer's second Doll, published in *Messages* in June 1939. Bellmer proposed twenty-four photographs to go with his friend's poems, with the title *Les jeux de la poupée* (The games of the doll) for their projected book. France's declaration of war on Nazi Germany on September 3, 1939, interrupted the publication of *The Games of the Doll,* but Edition Premières (Heinz Berggruen) finally published it in 1949. This edition of *The Games of the Doll* included fourteen poems by Éluard, fifteen hand-colored photographs of the second Doll, and a preface by Bellmer entitled "La jointure à boule" (The ball joint).

In the 1930s, Bellmer also produced a substantial body of drawings, watercolors, gouaches, and collages, as well as object-sculptures such as *La mitraillette en état de grâce* (Machine gunneress in a state of grace, 1937/1961). The motifs of the articulated doll, of the mannequin, of the double, and of young girls at play are equally prominent in these works. *Rose ouverte la nuit* (Rose open at night, 1934) shows a young girl tearing the skin from her torso to examine her ribcage and entrails.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Bellmer experimented with surrealist techniques such as *décalcomanie,* and with pornographic pictures of his lover Nora Mitrani. His art lingered on the "cephalopod"—monstrous female creatures consisting of a pair of legs topped by a head, or of two or more heads fitted on or within a serpentine body. He played with variations of *déshabillage* (disrobing, unclothing) in which a female figure peeled back her skin to reveal the innards (sometimes inhabited by another figure, sometimes penetrated by a huge, erect penis in a savage act of rape). Bellmer also created a series of "bondage photographs" of his lover and collaborator Unica Zürn, herself a remarkable writer, poet, and visual artist.

Another project that begins to materialize in the late 1940s would absorb Bellmer's creative energy until the end of his life: illustrations of, and graphic works inspired by, notorious texts of modern erotic literature, including the Marquis de Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795, *Philosophy in the bedroom,*), *Les cent vingt journees de Sodome* (1785, *One Hundred Twenty Days of Sodom,* published 1904, 1931–35), and *Justine ou Les malheurs de la vertu* (1791, *Justine or Good Conduct Well Chastised)*; Georges Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* (1928, *Story of the Eye*) and *Madame Edwarda (1937/1941)*; and Pauline Réage's *Histoire d'O* (1954, *Story of O*).[4]

Among Bellmer's obsessive explorations of sexual desire—the disturbing truncation and mutilation of the female body; the reductive and clichéd envisioning of the female figure as prostitute, as emasculating monster, or as sexually precocious and depraved young girl (especially in his photos and graphic works); the infantile, intrauterine fantasies and the explicitly pornographic images proliferating in the artist's late work, there is no doubt that his two articulated Dolls are highly significant. The Dolls were the point of departure for a life-long journey into erotic art. To understand Bellmer's vision, we need first to consider his theories of eroticism, the unconscious, and the body, which he formulated in particular in the three texts compiled in *The Doll.*

## LITTLE ANATOMY OF BELLMERIAN DESIRE

The essays included in *The Doll* aim to uncover the unconscious principle of sexual desire. They also seek to elucidate the mechanisms, forms, and transformations of the human capacity for expression, above all of imagination and artistic creation. Bellmer describes the former endeavor in terms of making visible the "anatomy of desire," and the latter in terms of investigating the "anatomy of the image." These two types of "anatomy" are not rigorous: they are nearly identical, because both reveal the effects of what Bellmer calls the "physical unconscious." The physical unconscious represents the totality of the continual unconscious transformations of physical sensations aiming at countering or circumventing repression and taboo.

The physical unconscious's ceaseless production of virtual images and projections corresponding to repressed or forbidden desires and fantasies has two main consequences: on the one hand, the ego splits into opposed aspects, "an ego that experiences arousal and an ego that produces arousal"; on the other hand, the individual's body image is constantly altered, and new body images are created. A bodily center of arousal eventually merges with its

virtual double to produce a new body image, and likewise the ego that experiences arousal and the ego that produces arousal are synthesized into a new, superior form of consciousness, a third ego that will be responsible for "its self-maintenance and its (new) reality."[5]

The above reflections are developed mainly in "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious," the most ambitious chapter in *The Doll*. "The Ball-Joint" speculates mainly on the "principle of the universal joint," also called the "principle of the focal point." For Bellmer, the Cardan joint best demonstrates this principle whereby an "arrangement of rings which, swiveling crossways, supports an object at their centre in a constant state of equilibrium, undisturbed by outside oscillations" serves to "couple two shafts that both transmit a force, and that are set at an obtuse and variable angle to one another in space."[6] The Cardan joint (which Bellmer equates with the universal joint and the ball joint) belongs to the realm of the marvelous because it allows two opposed principles—concentricity and eccentricity—to coexist simultaneously, the one implicated within the other. In other words, the artist claims, the inside-out perspective and the outside-in perspective are reversible. The same type of interchangeability or reversibility applies to the individual and the nonindividual, the ego/self and the universe.

"The Ball-Joint" goes on to suggest that the (second) articulated Doll (also based on the "principle of the universal joint") is a "poetic stimulator" that not only allows concentric and eccentric motion, individual perspective and cosmic-universal perspective to coexist, reinforce, and merge in one another, but also participates in the creation of a third, "higher reality"—an "amalgam of subjective reality and objective reality."[7]

In "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious," Bellmer takes to speculative extremes the principles of doubling of the body image, of reversibility of the doubles, and of the interaction and fusion of opposite laws/realities/notions as premises for the emergence of a third, "higher" (i.e., marvelous, irrational, nonsensical, poetic) reality, which makes the "theoretically scandalous" object into a "poetic stimulator." The notion of *extroversion,* or the fantasy of the body's turning inside out, is thus defined as the "wish to see and scandalously expose the inside." Moreover, for Bellmer, extroversion expresses the reversibility of the sexes. In his desire to identify completely with the beloved woman and to possess her utterly both in the flesh and in the imagination, the loving male subject becomes obsessed with her image to the point of "exchang(ing) the male Self with the female Other in order to sodomise the Self in the Other." Bellmer thus adds an axiom on the interchangeability of the masculine and feminine body images (or masculine and feminine

principles), and on their potential fusion in the perfect image of the hermaphrodite: "Masculine and feminine images are interchangeable, and both the one and the other tend towards their amalgam, the hermaphrodite."[8]

This often-quoted axiom seems to anticipate Lacan's notion of the interchangeability of the subject's masculine and feminine positions with respect to the phallus as dominant signifier, and Bellmer's insistence on an analogy between the language of the body (as seen in the body image) and language in general seems to prefigure Lacan's famous dictum "the unconscious is structured like a language." Anagrams, palindromes, puns, jokes, reversed writing, and other language games, Bellmer asserts confidently, are the outcome of the same unconscious desires and mechanisms (repression, condensation, displacement of the libido). They are created through much the same rules and principles—permutation, transference, multiplication, division, reversibility, analogy, dissembly, and reassembly—as the body image and other types of bodily expression. To the extent that human language and the human body are produced and undone by desire, and to the extent that each is metamorphic, never identical to itself, language and the body are equivalent and function as doubles or mirror reflections of one another. For Bellmer, the specular relation between language and body results in poetic anagrams; language and body are anagrammatic (de)constructions, each one the flipside of the other.

> The sentence is comparable to a body that appears to invite you to disarticulate it, so that its true contents may be recomposed through an endless series of anagrams.
>
> The body is comparable to a sentence that appears to invite you to disarticulate it, so that its true contents may be recomposed through an endless series of anagrams.[9]

The anagram is the most productive and unpredictable figure (as method or process) for rendering the "true contents" or unconscious of language, the body, art, and thus for rendering the (image of) woman. The image of woman is thus apt to be "disarticulated and recomposed." Not only can the woman-image be subjected to continual permutations and transformations "through an endless series of anagrams," but also she herself becomes an *anagrammatic construction*. As such, the woman not only fulfills her destiny, or "experimental calling," as the infinitely pliant, manipulable, and recomposable object of male desire but also appears as the living anagram, the magical formula capable of revealing the marvelous, irrational, "true contents" of art or the unconscious.

> Only once woman has reached the peak of her experimental calling, is amenable to permutations and algebraic promises, and is willing to submit to transsubstantial whims, only once she is ductile, shrinkable and equipped with an epidermis and joints that are equal to the obvious inconvenience involved in *post-hoc* assembly or disassembly, only then will we finally be able to clarify the anatomy of desire.[10]

The essays included in *The Doll,* then, provide both a theory of and a critical commentary on Bellmer's work. The relevance of these essays for reading of the Doll photographs is evident: the two Dolls are "poetic stimulators," provocative objects that stimulate the imagination and arouse the senses, evoking unexpected, shocking, or scandalous associations. They are also uncanny objects hovering uncertainly "between the poles of the animate and the inanimate," quite literally "mobile, passive, and incomplete thing(s) that can be personified," assemblages of wood, plaster, and compacted tissue paper that do not have a life and mind of their own but "live solely through the thoughts projected onto" them, and whose "dollishness contain[s] the desire and intensity sought in it by the imagination."[11] Bellmer's writings offer an accurate description and theorizing of the articulated Doll's double function, on the one hand as powerful fetish enabling the gratification of the viewer's secret desires and fantasies, and on the other hand as magical poetic object that seems at once to embody the marvelous, the surreal, and the uncanny, and to stimulate the production of artworks that probe these dimensions.

BELLMER'S DOLL PHOTOGRAPHS TESTIFY TO THE ARTICULATED DOLL'S FUNCTION AS *PLASTIC ANAGRAM,* AS AN EXPERIMENTAL OBJECT BY MEANS OF WHICH ONE CAN TEST *THE ANAGRAMMATIC NATURE OF THE BODY AND LANGUAGE ALIKE.*

Bellmer's Doll photographs testify to the articulated Doll's function as *plastic anagram,* as an experimental object by means of which one can test *the anagrammatic nature of the body and language alike*: the intrinsic combinatorial materiality of both the bodily unconscious and the linguistic unconscious allows them to reinvent themselves through constant dislocations, permutations, and recombinations, and to produce new poetic images, unexpected new meanings. The many photographs of the second Doll show rearrangements or variations of its centerpiece (a round belly ball joint with two attached pelvises): a red-tinted Doll consisting of two opposing, identical pairs of legs wearing a school girl's white socks and black shiny shoes, leaning

against a tree in an ambiguous posture (Figure 1); a monstrous assemblage consisting of the same two pairs of legs topped by a torso with multiple breasts, a head, and an arm; the same aberrant torso with four breasts and a sightless young girl's half-bald head, sitting precariously on the margin of a sink; the arrangement of two pairs of girl's legs lying in a twisted position on a bare wooden floor, with one pair of legs pressed akimbo against a wall and a mirror. Such images can surely be interpreted, as Thérèse Lichtenstein, Malcolm Green, and others have noted, as records of anagrammatic permutations in which the Doll is presented as the result of a process of taking apart, shuffling, and recomposing the mannequin to produce a new entity. The pictures of the first and second Doll clearly corroborate Bellmer's assertion that the body and the sentence/language are interchangeable anagrammatic constructions, each appearing "to invite you to disarticulate it so that its true contents may be recomposed through an endless series of anagrams."[12]

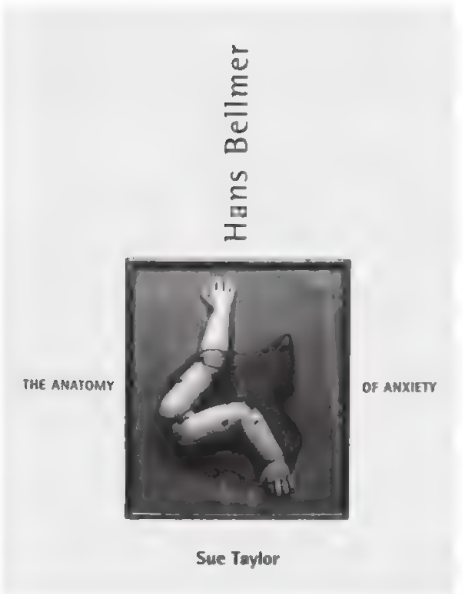



**FIGURE 1.** Cover of Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000). Details of the cover image: Hans Bellmer, "Jointure à boule (Ball Joint)," 1936, mixed media (52×45.5×7cm).

If I linger on the continuity between Bellmer's art and writings, it is to highlight the challenge it poses to the tendency of scholarship on Bellmer to psychoanalyze the artist and his art. It is certainly legitimate to see Bellmer's Doll photographs as dramatic *mises-en-scène* of sadism, masochism, castration anxiety, fetishism, or of a "negative" Oedipal complex manifesting itself as a desire for revenge against the father, or of a penchant for transvestism, or womb envy. One can also discern a critique of official Nazi art and of Nazi mass culture that reinscribes, however unwittingly, the authoritarian patriarchal values it abhors. Nevertheless, I wish to signal the importance of Bellmer's essays for an informed, carefully contextualized reading of his works.[13] I have two goals in doing so: First, I propose to show that Bellmer's theory of the physical unconscious may also be regarded as a theory of the anagram and of the anagrammar of the unconscious, which both responds to and rewrites the Freudian theory of the anagrammatic nature of the unconscious. Second, I shall argue that Bellmer's theory of the

anagrammatic unconscious is doubled by—or is the flipside of—a metaphysics of perversion that ground a poetics and aesthetics of perversion.

## FREUD'S ANAGRAMMARS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS AND BELLMER'S METAPHYSICS OF PERVERSION

In "The Ball-Joint," Bellmer writes that the Doll is a "poetic stimulator" whose "subjective reality" may enter into various combinations with the "objective reality" of the world—a tree, a chair, the steps in the house, a forest—in order to form an amalgam "of a far higher reality because it is simultaneously subjective and objective."[14] This amalgam can itself function as a "poetic stimulator" by generating poetic images—the basic material of art. This is precisely Bellmer's method in his photographs of the second Doll, which appears propped up against a tree, seated on a chair, strewn in bits and pieces along a flight of steps, or barely holding together as an assemblage of body parts that seems to have grown uncannily out of broken chair (Figure 2).




**FIGURE 2.** Cover of Peter Webb with Robert Short, *Death, Desire, and the Doll: The Life and Art of Hans Bellmer* (London: Solar Books, 2006). Originally published under the title *Hans Bellmer* (London: Quartet Books, 1985). Details of the cover image: "The Second Doll" (Paris: Editions Filipacchi, 1983).

The "Ball-Joint" essay mentions other methods to induce the Doll to transcend its condition as a "mobile, passive, and incomplete thing" and to assume its function as poetic stimulator: "dismantlement, permutation, fusion, the cross-section . . . coloring, substitution."[15] In his experiments with the second Doll, Bellmer gives precedence to permutation—the operation of exchanging or substituting one object (or set of objects) for another object (or set), producing new combinations. Through permutation the Doll becomes a living, mutable thing, an object capable of generating an enormous number of combinations that seem to promise exponential growth and proliferation of desire, creativity, and the imagination, an overproduction of alternative fantasies. This surplus of possible Dolls, of new

ways of manipulating and reinventing the fetish or the other, also implies an indefinite deferral of gratification, a suspension of desire in a limbo of constant arousal and expectations. "Throughout my combinations of doll parts or combinations of more or less complete sections of the 'Doll,'" writes Bellmer, "I have found some that had no meaning, which do not provoke the feeling of the 'probable' or the 'desired'—and that communicated absolutely nothing. On the other hand I have found some that arouse me in an incomparable way."[16] Such pleasurable-painful deferral of fulfillment is the very condition for and structure of perversion.

By the mid-1950s, the concept of permutation had become for Bellmer synonymous with the anagram, and the body itself seemed to have metamorphosed into—or rather to have finally revealed its nature as—linguistic material, a language or arrangement of sentences allowing for indefinite disassembly and reassembly, a curious anagrammatic invention allowing for rebus-like play: "The body is comparable to a sentence that appears to invite you to disarticulate it, so that its true contents may be recomposed through an endless series of anagrams."

By 1967, the permutational drive in Bellmer's works seems to have taken the next step: now completely reversible, language and the body seem to have divested themselves of everything but their combinatorial libido, shining forth as pure anagrams—indeed as *pure anagrammars*: "The sentence is comparable to a body that appears to invite you to disarticulate it, so that its true contents may be recomposed through an endless series of anagrams." In other words, it took Bellmer some thirty years to fully articulate a theory—the theory of the anagrammar of the unconscious—that he had already made manifest in his experiments with the second Doll. It took the artist three decades to realize the possibilities opened in his experiments with the first and second Doll. What is particularly intriguing about Bellmer's psychoanalytic theory of the anagrammar of the (physical) unconscious is not only that it completes (and rewrites) the anagrammatic theory implicit in Freud, but also that it takes the form of a poetics, aesthetics and metaphysics of perversion. What is Freud's contribution to a psychoanalytic theory of the anagram, and what is Bellmer's interpretation of this contribution?

In a recent stimulating article, Andrea Bachner contends that a consistent, systematic engagement with the concepts, theories, and poetics of the anagram in psychoanalysis—what she calls "anagrammatizing psychoanalysis"—opens up fascinating new perspectives on psychoanalysis. Starting from a more inclusive notion of the anagram—one that designates simultaneously "a process (consisting) in a disassembling and reassembling of parts

of the same basic material," and "a meeting place of different sign systems . . . (which) does not have to consist of only one of these systems . . . (and) which makes the combinatorial character of sign systems visible"—Bachner traces the (re)articulations, displacements, and implicit theorizations of this process and figure in Freud, Lacan, and Lyotard.[17] Of particular interest for my purposes here is Bachner's discussion of the "anagrammars of the unconscious" in Freud.

Bachner argues that, in important Freudian texts such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, *Die Traumdeutung*), *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*), *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*), and *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1917, *Vorlesungen zur Einfürung in die Psychanalyse*), we find conceptualizations of the processes underlying dreamwork, jokes, and slips of the tongue—displacement, condensation, and secondary revision—in terms of permutational, combinatorial operations displaying strong anagrammatic traits. The two main processes at work in the unconscious, namely, displacement (*Verschiebung*) and condensation (*Verdichtung*), as well as the process of transposing signs from one system into another, are also conceived in terms of anagrammatic permutation and recombination. The implication, in Bachner's opinion, is that the Freudian grammar of the unconscious is actually an *anagrammar.* This insight allows a two-fold rearticulation of Freudian theory: First, the psyche should be seen as an agon between the destructive, dissipating forces of Thanatos and the binding, combinatorial forces of Eros, or as what Freud described as "a battlefield for the struggle of opposite tendencies" (*ein Kampf- und Tummelplatz entgegengesetzter Tendenzen*). Second, the psychic topography theorized by Freud would have to be reframed in terms of different constraints put upon the processes of disassembling and reassembling that take place in each of the three systems of the mind—the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious.

Bachner's first point above invites us to rethink the dynamics of pleasure and repression. While pleasure is inherent in both Thanatos and Eros, the two forces cannot exist independently; each is fully implicated in the other. As such, the libido and the death drive are "both fulfilled and cancelled out in their mutual game." Her second point suggests that the boundaries between the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious are very fluid, yet reinforces the importance of language in each of these zones.[18]

Bellmer was aware that his thinking on the anagram was indebted to an anagrammatic theory that had remained a latent possibility in Freud. He refers to Freud in "The Ball-Joint," in "Little Anatomy of the Physical

Unconscious," and in his letters. His axiomatic enunciation of various theoretical propositions in "Little Anatomy" recalls Freud. And finally, in his correspondence and recorded conversations, he makes clear that his theory of the anagrammatic unconscious constituted a contribution to psychoanalysis, and in particular to Freudian theory.[19]

Bellmer's theory of the anagrammatic (physical) unconscious, then, uncovers and realizes the underlying anagrammar in Freud's thinking about the unconscious, the libido, and the death drive. He deploys a series of strategies. For instance, he uses Freud's reflections on the capacity of dreamwork to unite opposite elements, and on the tendency in certain primitive languages to use only one word or term for designating opposite qualities or activities, in the service of what he calls the principle of the synthesis of opposites in a "third, higher reality." Moreover, he deploys the concept of the body image—borrowed from Freudian psychologists Paul Schilder and Jean Lhermitte—reading it in terms of symbolic, combinatorial image production that also illuminates the anagrammatic nature of the unconscious. He also resorts to citations, illustrations, and demonstrations culled from such disparate fields as mechanics, topology, astronomy, hysteria, and mediumship, which he masterfully condenses in the figure of the Doll as living anagram of male desire.[20] What distinguishes Bellmer's theory of the anagram(mar) of the physical unconscious from Freud's implicit anagrammar of the psyche is Bellmer's insistence on the anagram as figure, expression, and constitutive process of the unconscious, body, language, and art. Bellmer envisions this anagrammar as poetics or aesthetics—as his ample use of photographs, drawings, and anagram poems attests.[21] Moreover, the Bellmerian theory of the anagram(matic unconscious) is doubled by a metaphysics of perversion whose formulation is as blatant and explicit as it is deftly camouflaged.

Many commentators have discussed the photographs of the first and second Doll found in *The Doll* in terms of perversions such as sadism, masochism, and fetishism. They have called attention to the stereotyped, sensationalist representation of victimized, depraved, or criminal female characters in German popular culture from the late nineteenth century to the Weimar Republic (e.g., cheap serial novels and *Schundfilme* or "junk films"); and to the aesthetics of the doll, the automaton, and the marionette both in avant-garde art and in interwar European mass culture. It is easy to see, in the closing paragraphs of "Memories of the Doll Theme," a dramatization of sadistic fantasies of revenge against young girls whom the artist had secretly admired and desired in his childhood and adolescence.[22] But rather than read Bellmer's art as an expression of his perversion or that of German culture,

I would like to call attention to his highly original theory of an *anagrammar of perversion,* which begins with an emphasis on the splitting of the ego in "The Images of the Self," the first chapter of "Little Anatomy."

Bellmer refers to a "spirit of contradiction in the organism that entertains fairly irrational intentions and (that) has a penchant for the absurd, if not exactly the scandalous,"[23] which is also a fine description of the disavowals characteristic of perversion. And his ideas about the splitting of the ego resonate with Sartre's theorization of "a new synthesis of the Other," and with Joan Copjec's conceptualization of "the splitting of consciousness" found in perversion. Such splitting results from the subject's attempt to unite or reconcile opposite, incompatible tendencies such as "an ego that experiences arousal and an ego that produces arousal" in a "new form of the ego," a "third reality," or a new body image.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES BELLMER'S THEORY OF THE ANAGRAM(MAR) OF THE PHYSICAL UNCONSCIOUS FROM FREUD'S IMPLICIT ANAGRAMMAR OF THE PSYCHE IS BELLMER'S INSISTENCE ON THE ANAGRAM AS FIGURE, EXPRESSION, AND CONSTITUTIVE PROCESS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS, BODY, LANGUAGE, AND ART.

In *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre assesses the disavowal at work in sadism: the pervert/sadist attempts to conjoin or unite opposite notions of desire and the law, gaze and vision, conscious and unconscious within a new synthesis of the Other. He attempts to force the Other to be both "an actual person and a transcendent condition of possibility." What arouses the sadist's desire is not so much the scene of torture he stages or the sight of his victim's pain and suffering but rather the victim's free decision "to identify with the tortured flesh."[24] For the pervert/sadist there is no contradiction, no conflict between his desire, the law as absolute authority, and the representative of the law: for instance, for Sade there was no gap, no antinomy whatsoever between his mother-in-law, Madame de Montreuil, and the law as state institution. To Sade, Madame de Montreuil represented the law itself: infallible and contingent, endowed with absolute authority, and grotesque. Forged in the furnace of disavowal, the Other of the pervert is thus "arbitrary, relative, and yet absolute in its power."[25]

In her illuminating discussion of perversion in *Imagine There Is No Woman,* Joan Copjec argues that the pervert's splitting of consciousness occurs as a result of his inability to subjectivize his perverse, transgressive acts, which he perceives as the absolute command or injunction of the Other or of the law. Another factor in the pervert's splitting of consciousness is his renunciation or disavowal of pleasure in order to assume it as a duty that he has been

contracted to fulfill. *Jouissance* becomes a service performed by the pervert on behalf of the Other. Freud's comments on fetishism suggest that there is considerable hostility in the fetishist's worship of the fetish: the Chinese male's reverence for the woman whose feet were bound and mutilated for his pleasure seems to disguise a special kind of gratitude, as if he were thanking the woman for having submitted to torture. Copjec turns to Lacan's intervention in the debate on perversion in "Kant with Sade." She concludes that in sadism it may be the other way round: the victim thanks or is expected to thank the torturer for torturing her. Or perhaps "the pervert reveres the Other precisely by torturing him/(her)."[26]

Copjec cautions us that acts of transgression in perversion cannot be confused with the ethical action of the Kantian moral subject. The pervert can afford to be indifferent toward the laws and institutions of his society because his hatred has been transposed onto (or has materialized in) the social ideological apparatus, or the big Other, which appears (as Freud noted) to hate on his behalf. If the Kantian subject's indifference stems from a structural "out-of-jointness" with or revolt against his or her world, the categorical moral imperative that forces him or her to abandon this stance and take radical ethical action on behalf of his suffering fellow men and women has nothing to do with the pervert's (fantasized) ineluctable law. Ultimately then, to understand perversion, one has to stop thinking of sexuality as "a relation between a subject and an other, or object-choice deemed to be either correct or incorrect, normal or deviant." Perversion, like neurosis and psychosis, should be conceived in terms of a psychic structure encompassing various types of relations, including one's relation to the big Other or the totality of laws and institutions governing the social world. As psychical structures, the notions of neurosis, psychosis, and perversion reveal more affinities with Heidegger's notion of *Existentialen,* or formal conditions for the possibility of being-in-the-world, than with late-nineteenth-century psychology's concept of clinical "pathologies," which Freudian theory inherited. Copjec stresses that the philosophical significance of perversion lies less in the superficial similarities that can be detected between its structural defiance and the disjunction between the modern subject and its world than in the way it illuminates a peculiarly rigid, obsessional type of being-in-the-world, a specific kind of fantasmatic social and libidinal relations.[27]

Bellmer's initial description of the formation of a new body image through the ego's simultaneous division into and reunification of opposite responses to desire and other external stimuli seems to anticipate Sartre's and Copjec's conceptualization of the pervert's splitting of consciousness

as a characteristic form of disavowal. And, in subsequent chapters of "Little Anatomy," Bellmer presents a more ambitious articulation of these issues, which culminates in a full-fledged theory of perversion. His description of the woman, quoted below, as living fetish, as a permutational, pliant, and submissive body that seems endlessly de- and recomposable in accordance with the male lover's/pervert's desires and fantasies, appears as a shorthand for—indeed, as a miniature dictionary of—perversion's odd behaviors and being-in-the-world as envisioned by Copjec and other theorists. The woman here is posited both as a victim and as an absolute, merciless Other commanding the lover to mistreat her. While the perverse male lover seems, in this instance at least, to disavow "the physical act of love" in favor of the imagination's unbearable suspense and deferrals, he clearly sees the woman as what Copjec (in the wake of Sartre's theorization of the Sadean libertine / the Sadist) has described as both "an actual person and a transcendent condition of possibility."

> Only once woman has reached the peak of her experimental calling, is amenable to permutations and algebraic promises, and is willing to submit to transsubstantial whims, only once she is ductile, shrinkable and equipped with an epidermis and joints that are equal to the obvious inconveniences involved in post-hoc assembly and disassembly, only then will we finally be able to clarify the anatomy of desire. And far more precisely than permitted by the physical act of love—a practice by which everyone deciphers the reality of the imagined, but whose documentation persists in being restricted to subjective evidence. The living, three-dimensional object suggests its possible metamorphoses, though without actually undergoing them; they would in any case remain beyond the powers of photography.[28]

In Bellmer's subsequent elaboration of the male pervert's desire in "Little Anatomy," the woman is no longer a mere "living, three-dimensional (fetish) object" but the living material for actual bondage with iron wire, various torments, and even (a possible) murder. Still obeying the woman's / the law's / the absolute Other's (imagined) commands, the pervert-criminal's transgression now openly and unabashedly attempts to force a convergence between "his elementary certainties, the geometrical and algebraic habits of his thoughts" (note the implacable, obsessive certainty and mathematical regularity of the pervert's desire) and "the image of the woman," while at the same time endeavoring to effectuate an equally forced fusion of the natural and the artificial, desire and the law, reality and fantasy in his very transgressive act

(or through the tortured flesh of the woman). Once again the woman is envisioned as suffering body, as "transcendent condition of possibility," as well as immanent presence (the woman is compared to Diana of Ephesus, the very signifier for the fertility of nature and/or the female).

> In order to establish objective proofs we shall have to resort to the craftsman, turned criminal by his most humanly sensitive and beautiful passion: the wall between woman and her image must be demolished.
>
> According to a certain photographic image that has remained an unfading memory, a man had haphazardly bound his victim's thighs, shoulders, chest, back, and belly with strong iron wire in order to deform her. Tightly crisscrossed, it produced swollen cushions of flesh, irregular . . . triangles . . . creating hitherto unseen multiplications of breasts in indescribable places.
>
> *Notes*: the statue of Diana of Ephesus was a black cone bristling with breasts. Le Nôtre, the practical fusion of the natural with the imagined: just as the gardener forces the box tree to exist as a cone, sphere, or cube, so will man force his elementary certainties, the geometrical and algebraic habits of his thoughts, upon the image of a woman.[29]

The "arbitrary, relative, and yet absolutely powerful Other" that causes a splitting of consciousness in the pervert in the sense that the latter perceives his/her transgressive activity as the Other's will or command is conceived in "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious or the Anatomy of the Image" in at least three ways: as a You (or Thou), a rather ambiguous notion that may designate the Other *tout court,* the external world or the environment, as well as a sense of transcendence; as woman in general, as well as the male subject's/pervert's ideal victim-partner; and finally as the universe itself. The You (*das Du* in the original German text) is described in the third chapter of "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious" as "a feature of the outside world, an already existing image that is ready to assume the role of a virtual focus of arousal," and which can be anything: a tree, a stone, any object in which a perceptual image and a memory image can merge, producing the phenomenon of perception. The image resulting from "this marriage of perception and imagination," argues Bellmer, has two major characteristics: a special intensity, "which probably ensues from the . . . *violence involved in establishing the equivalence of two merely similar, perhaps dissimilar, or even extremely different images,*" and the fact that it assumes the role of a "*doppelganger . . . that saves me from contorting my own self, for it does so in my stead.*"[30] This account of perversion presents an almost literal description of the violence involved in the

transgressive act, which forces two "dissimilar, or even extremely different" (read "opposite") notions to coalesce, and which projects onto the outside world or its representative the pervert's hatred or *ressentiment*, or an external Other, this Other being the one that "does the contorting . . . in (my)/his stead," or "hates on (my)/his behalf." As if this description were not explicit enough, the text adds that the experience of adhering simultaneously to two conflicting (or "very dissimilar") ideas, of forcing them to merge, and of transferring one's hatred onto an external Other who "hates on our behalf" is very similar to dreamwork insofar as both the processes of dreamwork and the transgressions of perversion are triggered by "prohibition" and also because both dreams and perversion may involve "sadism, or at the very least aggressiveness!"[31]

THE BELLMERIAN WOMAN IS THUS ACCORDED A DOUBLE "PRIVILEGE." ON THE ONE HAND SHE EMBODIES THE ACT AND PRINCIPLE OF SODOMY AS THE VERY ESSENCE OF PERVERSION. ON THE OTHER HAND SHE IS DESTINED TO INTRODUCE THE PRINCIPLE OF THE REVERSIBILITY OF THE SEXES, AND OF THEIR POTENTIAL FUSION IN THE CONCEPT OF THE HERMAPHRODITE, INTO THE SYSTEM OF REPRESENTATION.

As for the woman as (the pervert's) Other, she is conceived, as we saw above, as an experimental object, a substitute for the anagrammatic Doll, who like the Doll is "born of division, subtraction and multiplication, but also of the interchangeability that mathematicians call 'permutation'" and thus may be reduced to the "impossible formula . . . of a synthetic Eve . . . (or) the woman with no heart." She is also the one who inexorably forces the man to "exchange (his) male Self with the female Other in order to sodomise his Self in the Other."[32] As an absolute Other who has no existence, no *raison d'être* outside the realm of the male pervert's sadistic, obscene fantasies, the Bellmerian woman is thus accorded a double "privilege." On the one hand she embodies the act and principle of sodomy as the very essence of perversion—that infamous principle of non(re)production, of total lack of exchange or market value, which Klossowski regarded as the epitome of the Sadean ideal of transgression, and which he described as a *"geste spécifique de contre-généralité"* (a specific gesture of countergenerality or counterproductivity), and as an "act of useless jouissance."[33] On the other hand she is destined to introduce the principle of the reversibility of the sexes, and of their potential fusion in the concept of the hermaphrodite, into the system of representation: "Masculine and feminine images are interchangeable, and both the one and the other tend towards their amalgam, the hermaphrodite."

Often regarded as a monstrous aberration of or contradiction in the laws of nature, the figure of the hermaphrodite also epitomizes, in the Bellmerian system, the disavowal of sexual difference characteristic of perversion.[34]

The third important figuration of the absolute Other of perversion in "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious" is none other than the universe itself. In a striking passage at the end of the essay, Bellmer describes a kind of epiphany during which the ego and the universe, or the individual and the nonindividual, become interchangeable and merge into one another. The notion of the "super-rational" articulated in this passage is paradoxical: at once thoroughly materialistic, ironic, and grounded, and at the same time aspiring for transcendence. It presupposes an ego or self that is simultaneously indistinguishable from the universe, and that can function as an autonomous singularity. Never identical to itself, this self is an anagram, a process of constant fragmentation, displacement, and recombination. What is perverse in the Bellmerian conception of the anagrammatic body or experimental being is precisely the simultaneous acknowledgment and disavowal of the voracious, infinite metamorphosis of desire, which not only mocks the ego's claim to integrity but at the same time imagines itself as the origin and the very law of creation itself.

> For a brief instant the individual and non-individual become interchangeable and the terror of the ego's mortal limitations in time and space is extinguished. The void ceases to be when everything a person is not is added to him; only then does he appear to be "himself." He appears to exist in the universe with all of his most singular data yet simultaneously be independent of himself. It is in such heightened moments of resolution that a thrill of fearless horror is transformed into an intensified feeling for life, into an illusion: the sense that one is participating, beyond the span between birth and death, in the existence of a tree, in the YOU, in the fate of inevitable chance, yet remains Self, as an echo—on the other side.
>
> It may be hoped that such considerations will free the question of the "super-rational" from speculative confusion. This unknown can now be placed at the focal point of human behavior for the purpose of passionate and unceasing elucidation; it has become experimental.[35]

The Bellmerian desire to control, not only the woman and the ego but also the (un)making of the world or of the universe itself, is clearly enabled by perversion. In all the essays we have examined, and in particular in "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious," Bellmer strives to articulate a theory, or

anagrammar, of perversion that can function simultaneously as a metaphysics, an aesthetics, or poetics, and even as a "science" of the latter.[36] ("Science" refers here to the artist's mobilizing of mathematics, psychology, alchemy, physics, psychoanalysis, and criminal anthropology to conceptualize the anagrammatic theory he envisioned.[37]) The "metaphysical" bent is especially apparent in passages such as the one quoted above on the merger of the self/ego and the universe. What we see in such passages is an unequivocal expression of the pervert's *world without others,* which Deleuze has conceptualized as a vision in which the structure-Other, or the primary structure of the a priori Other that makes the world possible, is missing. In this perverse world, argues Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense,* the category of the necessary has replaced that of the possible, and the "others" inhabiting it are no longer perceived by the pervert as real others or as concrete terms actualizing the structure-Other, but as bodies-victims, as accomplices-doubles, and as accomplices-elements. It is a world in which the cause of desire is separated from its objects, sexual difference is disavowed, and the pervert feels free to direct his desire at the sun, the sky, the sea, or the entire universe. The perverse structure ruling the pervert's world is one in which an "Other-cide" or an "altrucide"—the murder of the Other and the possible—is inherent.[38]

WHAT IS PERVERSE IN THE BELLMERIAN CONCEPTION OF THE ANAGRAMMATIC BODY OR EXPERIMENTAL BEING IS PRECISELY THE SIMULTANEOUS ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND DISAVOWAL OF THE VORACIOUS, INFINITE METAMORPHOSIS OF DESIRE, WHICH NOT ONLY MOCKS THE EGO'S CLAIM TO INTEGRITY BUT AT THE SAME TIME IMAGINES ITSELF AS THE ORIGIN AND THE VERY LAW OF CREATION ITSELF.

The subject or self that becomes indistinguishable from the universe in the conclusion of "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious" is that of a pervert living in a world without others: the figures of the doll, of the woman-as-living-anagram, of the willing victim whose body was tightly bound with iron wire by the "craftsman turned criminal by his beautiful passion," or of the female cephalopod, consisting merely of a head and a pair of legs, function as accomplices-doubles, or as bodies-victims, rather than as real others. The pervert's merger with the universe is conceived as an "illusion" in which the world's elements—"a tree, the YOU, the fate of inevitable chance"—appear as shadow doubles or as what Deleuze calls "liberated accomplices-elements," and in which the (pervert's) self also seems doubled "as an echo—on the other side." The "super-rational unknown" animating the Bellmerian

pervert's world-without-others is a perverse structure—what Bellmer called the "*principe de perversion*" (principle or law of perversion).

Bellmer's theory or anagrammar of perversion, then, is consistent with his career-long experiment with transgressive eroticism, perverse fantasies, pornography, and visions of death. The artist appears to have succeeded, as he stated late in his life, in engineering a "direct contact" between his work and the "principle of perversion."[39] The creativity and imagination that were liberated by this privileged "contact," however, ultimately proved very limited, producing an often inspired, yet violently misogynistic, pornographic, and oppressive art of "illusion" and "useless jouissance," rather than producing the radical "revolution" envisioned by Bretonian surrealism.[40]

*Inosensu*'s stylish, postcyberpunk-noirish aesthetic is considerably broader in scope and more radical in its politics and effects than the Bellmerian "experimental" paradigm of the *principe de perversion*. Yet it owes a great deal to Bellmer.

## Notes

I am indebted to Tom LaMarre for his incisive comments on earlier versions of this essay. I owe thanks also to Frenchy Lunning, Christopher Bolton, and an anonymous reader for their constructive feedback. Jean-Pierre Monnet, Martin Picard, and Juan Munoz have provided invaluable assistance with technical logistics and in locating material.

1. A Production I. G. film, *Inosensu* was released in Japan in March 2004 and in the United States in September of the same year. It was a finalist for the Palme d'Or at the 2004 Cannes Festival. *Inosensu* was awarded the Japan SF Grand Prix (Nihon SF Taishō) in 2004. It has generated spin-offs such as Yamada Masaki's prequel novel, *After the Long Goodbye*. Isaac Asimov's famous Three Laws of Robotics were first introduced in a 1942 short story entitled "Runaround." Batou's name, which appears in katakana, could also be romanized "Batō."

2. While the design of the Hadaly gynoids is indebted to Bellmer and to the work of Yoshida Ryō, the hacker Kim was modeled on *Otoko* (Man), a life-size mannequin by Yotsuya Shimon (also known as Yotsuya Simon). Yoshida and Yotsuya are well-known doll artists who have acknowledged their indebtedness to Bellmer. On *Inosensu*'s engagement with the art of Bellmer, Yoshida Ryō, and Yotsuya Shimon, see *Roman Album: Inosensu/Innocence* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2004), 3, 27; Oshii Mamoru and Sakakiyama Yūko, "Keishiki toshite no Nihon, ningyō, anime" (Japan, dolls, and anime as landscape), *Yuriika* 37, no. 5 (May 2005): 106–15; Oshii Mamoru, *Inosensu sōsaku nōto: Ningyō, kenchiku, shintai no tabi purasu taidan* (Production notes on *Inosensu*: Dolls, architecture, the body, and interviews), (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2004), 19–55; Ogawa Chieko, "Tasha toshite no ningyōsei to Nihonjin" (Dollhood as alterity and the Japanese), *Yuriika* 37, no. 5 (May 2005): 55–57; and Oshii Mamoru and Yotsuya Shimon, "Hito wa naze ningyō wo tsukuru no ka" (Why do we make dolls?), in Oshii, *Inosensu sōsaku nōto*, 244–62. The *Dolls of Innocence* exhibition

was held at the Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art from February 7 to March 21, 2004. It featured works by doll makers such as Yotsuya Shimon, Yoshida Ryō, Koitsuki Hime, Akiyama Mahoko, and Amano Katan, as well as a selection of Bellmer's famous Doll pictures. A stimulating recent study of *Inosensu's* remediation of Bellmer's work is Steven T. Brown, "Machinic Desires: Hans Bellmer's Dolls and the Technological Uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence,*" in *Mechademia* 3 (2008): 222–53. Brown argues that *Inosensu*'s exploration of the trope of the uncanny is a by-product of the movie's remediation of Hans Bellmer's Dolls, where I am concerned with the theory and aesthetic of perversion in both Bellmer's work and Oshii's anime.

3. Bellmer's essays constitute an intriguing body of texts that has until recently been underestimated. The earliest essay, "Memories of the Doll Theme," was published in 1934 at the author's expense. The second important essay, "The Ball-Joint," was included in *The Games of the Doll* (1949). *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'Anatomie de l'image* (Little anatomy of the physical unconscious or the anatomy of the image) was published in 1957. This slim volume expanded on the reflections articulated in "Memories of the Doll Theme" and "The Ball-Joint." Bellmer continued to revise both the earlier essays on the first and second Doll, and the texts included in *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious* until the early 1960s. A final edition of all these essays was published in Germany in 1963 under the title *Die Puppe* (Berlin: Gerhardt Verlag); translated by Malcolm Green as *The Doll* (London: Atlas Press, 2005). Bellmer's *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique* (Paris: Le Terrain vague, 1957) is translated by Jon Graham as *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious, or the Anatomy of the Image* (Waterbury Center, Vt.: Dominion Press, 2004). My discussion of Bellmer's essays in this article is indebted mainly to the studies of Malcolm Green, Pierre Dourthe, Jon Graham, and Sue Taylor. See Malcolm Green, "Introduction," in Hans Bellmer, *The Doll,* 7–30; Pierre Dourthe, *Bellmer, le principe de perversion* (Bellmer: The principle of perversion) (Paris: Jean-Pierre Faur, 1999), 123–57; Jon Graham, "Bellmer: Desertion and Desire," in Hans Bellmer, *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious, or The Anatomy of the Image,* xi–xviii; Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety,* 39–54, 99–104, 120–26, 212–18; and Pierre Dourthe, "Transformation et maîtrise du corps" (Transformation and mastery of the body) in *Hans Bellmer: Anatomie du désir,* ed. Agnès de la Beaumelle, 37–45 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard/Centre Pompidou, 2006). Unless otherwise indicated, citations of Bellmer's texts are from Green's translation.

4. For informative, recent studies and exhibition catalogs of Bellmer's work, see Peter Webb with Robert Short, *Death, Desire, and the Doll: The Life and Art of Hans Bellmer* (London: Solar Books, 2008); Michael Semff and Anthony Spira, eds., *Hans Bellmer* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2006); Agnès de la Beaumelle, ed., *Hans Bellmer: Anatomie du désir* (Hans Bellmer: Anatomy of desire); Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000); Pierre Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion.*

5. See Bellmer, *The Doll,* 106–12. Bellmer's notion of the body image relies on Paul Schilder's and Jean Lhermitte's theorization of the latter in *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (New York: International Universities Press, 1978 [1935]) and *L'image de notre corps* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998 [1939]), respectively. Schilder defines the body image (which he also calls bodily schema or postural model of the body) as "the tri-dimensional

image everybody has about himself . . . (an image that) is in perpetual self-construction and self-destruction . . . (and that lives) in its continued differentiation and integration" (*The Image and Appearance,* 11, 15–16). Lhermittes's very similar definition refers to a plastic three-dimensional body schema that allows the subject to perceive the world, and which undergoes constant transformations or alterations (*L'image de notre corps,* 15). On Bellmer's conceptualization of the body image see Taylor, *Hans Bellmer,* 101–9; and Dourthe, *Bellmer le principe de perversion,* 124–27, 136–45.

6. Bellmer, *The Doll,* 60–61.

7. Ibid., 60.

8. Ibid., 125.

9. Bellmer, "Preface," in Unica Zürn, *Oracles et spectacles* (Paris: George Visat, 1967), 4; Bellmer, *Die Puppe,* 128; and Bellmer, *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image,* 45. Translation mine. See Green's translation (*The Doll,* 133) as well as Jon Graham's in the 1957 edition of *Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious,* 37–38.

10. Bellmer, *The Doll,* 127.

11. Ibid., 40, 60.

12. For reproductions of the photographs of the second Doll I am evoking in this passage see Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion,* 69, 73, 74; Agnès de la Beaumelle, ed., *Hans Bellmer: Anatomie du désir,* 100, 102, 104, 106, 108–9; and Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety,* 73, 78. Many works produced by Bellmer in the 1930s and 1940s resonate with or illustrate the "theories" that are expounded in his essays. The object-assemblage *La jointure à boule: La poupée* (1936, Ball joint: The doll), for instance, demonstrates the principle of reversibility of body parts that is caused by desire: the doll's arms can be also be seen as legs; the central ball joint evokes at once a vagina, an eye, and an anus. The multiplication and constant transformation of the body image is explored in *La toupie* (1938/1968, The top), an object-sculpture consisting of multiple breasts, or in Bellmer's illustrations for Georges Hugnet's *Oeillades ciselées en branche* (Paris: Jeanne Bucher, 1939). For reproductions of these works see Dourthe, *Bellmer: le principe de perversion,* 78, 87, 92, 94-95.

13. For discussions of Bellmer's Doll photographs as visualizations of fantasies found in sadism, masochism, voyeurism, fetishism, and scopophilia, or as a critical commentary on Nazi art and mass culture that is at the same time complicit with the dominant patriarchal order, see Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*, 70-96; Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors*, 80–103, 127–38.

14. Bellmer, *The Doll*, 60.

15. Ibid., 70.

16. Letter to Herta Hausmann, in *Hans Bellmer,* special issue of *Obliques* (Paris: Editions Borderie, 1975), 118. Cited in Green, "Introduction," in *The Doll,* 19.

17. Andrea Bachner, "Anagrams in Psychoanalysis: Retroping Concepts by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Jean-François Lyotard," *Comparative Literature Studies* 40, no.1 (2003): 3.

18. Ibid., 5–11.

19. For references to Freud in *The Doll,* see 68–69, 112–13. See also *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique,* 19. For examples of "axiomatic theoretical formulations" in Bellmer's work, see sentences such as the following: "An object that is simply identical to itself lacks (all) reality . . . Whatever is not confirmed by chance lacks all validity" (*The Doll,* 127, 157).

On Bellmer's engagement with Freud and psychoanalytic theory in general, see Dourthe, *Bellmer: le principe de perversion,* 124–42; Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety,* 70–109; Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors,* 66–120. I have modified the title of the third chapter in Malcolm Green's translation of Bellmer's *Die Puppe* to read "Little Anatomy of the Physical Unconscious" in order to remain faithful to the original German title.

20. For Bellmer's discussion of Freud's argument on the union of opposite concepts, images, and objects in dreamwork and in "primitive" languages see *The Doll,* 112–17. On *The Doll*'s approach to the body image, see the preceding section, "Little Anatomy of Bellmerian Desire," and my note 5. Topics such as the anagram, reversed writing, mediumship, and hysteria, and mathematical notions such as topology, multiplication, division, and permutation, are also discussed in *The Doll,* see ibid., 109–10, 113–14, 129–30, 130–33.

21. Bellmer, Nora Mitrani, and Joë Bousquet created the anagram poems reproduced in *The Doll.* While Bellmer is widely regarded as the originator of the surrealist anagram poem, his collaborations with Mitrani, Bousquet, and especially with the painter and writer Unica Zürn (who was his companion between 1954 and 1970) greatly contributed to the development of his ideas on the anagram. Zürn's genius as an anagram poet is attested by texts such as *Hexentexte, Zeichnungen und Anagramme* (1954, Witches' texts: Drawings and anagrams) and *Oracles et spectacles* (1967, Oracles and spectacles). On Bellmer's and Zürn's practice of the art of the anagram, see Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion,* 140–50, 210–14; Alain Chévrier, "Sur l'origine des anagrammes d'Unica Zürn," in *Lettres au Docteur Ferdière,* ed. Alain Chévrier (Paris: Séguier, 1994), 125–43; Unica Zürn, "Die Begegnung mit Hans Bellmer," in *Unica Zürn Gesamtaufgabe* (Berlin: Brinkman und Bose, 1989), 5:172–80; Jean-François Rabain, "Sublimation et identifications croisées: les jeux à deux de Hans Bellmer et Unica Zürn," *Revue française de psychanalyse* 4 (1998): 1247–64.

22. On perverse fantasies and the imagination of perversion in Bellmer's work, see my note 13. See also Paul Ardenne, "Bellmer, oui ou non," in *Hans Bellmer: Anatomie du désir,* ed. Agnès de la Beaumelle, 47–61; Céline Masson, *La fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer: Le "faire oeuvre" perversif, une étude clinique de l'objet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); and Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty,* 102–22. For illuminating discussions of the relation between Bellmer's Doll photographs and German popular culture from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s on the one hand, and on the other hand between the artist's experiments with dolls and the fascination with dolls, robots, automata, and the machine aesthetic in avant-garde art and modernist cinema, see Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion,* 33–72; Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors,* 13–40, 49–66. On the various perverse fantasies in "Memories of the Doll Theme," see Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety,* 34–55.

23. *The Doll,* 108.

24. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 523.

25. Johan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 224.

26. Ibid., 228. Copjec paraphrases here Freud's discussion of the Chinese foot fetishist in his classic essay "Fetishism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* 24 volumes, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953), 21:157.

27. Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman,* 206–8, 222–28. Copjec's discussion of perversion is based on the theorization of the latter found in Freud, Lacan, Sartre, Guy Rosolato, Deleuze, and Jacques-Alain Miller. An excellent discussion of the psychoanalytic notion of perversion that expands on the insights of these theorists is James Penney, *The World of Perversion: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Absolute of Desire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 1–28. Penney insists on the distinction between the essential perversity of desire and perversion as such, between "desire's *generic* excess over its own law and a *particular* response of the subject to this excess—a specific subjective structure" (emphasis Penney). He also argues that the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality (as articulated especially by Freud and Lacan) "not only . . . splits the subject between a norm and a deviation or transgression, but also . . . insists that the effort to suture this split produces the ethically, and indeed politically, problematic perverse structure." In other words, Penney goes on to comment, what the pervert disavows is not so much sexual difference or the mother's castration, but "*the essential perversity of desire*" (emphasis Penney). See Penney, *The World of Perversion,* 1–2.

28. Bellmer, *The Doll,* 127. This passage was quoted in part in the previous section, "Little Anatomy of Bellmerian Desire."

29. Bellmer, *The Doll,* 129.

30. Ibid., 143–44, 146. Emphasis mine.

31. Ibid., 148.

32. Ibid., 125, 129.

33. Klossowski, "Sade ou le philosophe scélérat," special issue *La Pensée de Sade, Tel Quel* 28 (1967): 17–19.

34. *The Doll,* 125. Bellmer was preoccupied with the figure of the hermaphrodite throughout his career. "L'Aigle Mademoiselle," the young girl flaunting an erect penis that sprouts from her vagina and who appears in Bellmer's illustrations for Bataille's *Histoire de l'Oeil* and for *Petit traité de morale* (1968, Little treatise on morals), and the "phallus-girls" featured in the series of drawings entitled *Déshabillage* (1960–68) are among the most shocking representations of the hermaphrodite in the artist's oeuvre. For reproductions of these figures see Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion,* Figure 222, on page 180; Figures 308, 309, 310, on pages 236–37; Figure 311, on page 239; and Figure 333, on page 252. Critical discussions of hermaphroditism in Bellmer's work are legion. See Malcolm Green, "Introduction," in *The Doll,* 20–22; Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion,* 136–48, 176–82, 192–200, 230–52; Peter Gorsen, "Das Theorem der Puppe nach Hans Bellmer," in *Der Körper und seine Sprachen,* ed. Hans-Jürgen Heinrich, 107–35 (Frankfurt: Qumran Verlag, 1989); Peter Webb and Robert Short, *Hans Bellmer* (London: Quartet Book, 1985), 196–204; and Silvia Eiblmayr, "Hans Bellmer's Surrealist Eroticism—The Praying Mantis and the Shock of Mechanization," trans. Christin Czinglar, in *Real Text: Denken am Rande des Subjekts/Reflexions on the Periphery of the Subject,* ed. Georg Schöllhammer and Christian Kravagna, 233–38 (Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1993).

35. Bellmer, *The Doll,* 157–58.

36. Bellmer's intention that the essays in *The Doll* be read at once as an aesthetics or poetics, and as a "science" (of the marvelous and the unconscious) is also demonstrated by a letter he sent to Peter Gorsen on July 16, 1963, in which he writes: "The thing about my book . . . is that it simultaneously refers in very concise fashion to a great many different

areas of both science and emotions, because from the outset it aims at 'anti-specialization.'" See Malcolm Green, "Introduction," in *The Doll,* 8–9.

37. The essays included in *The Doll* cite or paraphrase thinkers such as Freud, Cardano, Copernicus, Philo of Byzantium, Cesare Lombroso, and Jean Lhermitte and frequently refer to discourses in topology, geometry, physics, psychoanalysis, and other sciences. See *The Doll*, 60–67, 112–15, 119.

38. See *The Logic of Sense,* 341–59. Deleuze's brilliant reading of perversion appears in his discussion of Michel Tournier's novel *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967, *Friday*). Note the similarities between *The Logic of Sense*'s reading of perversion, 357–59, and Copjec's reading of the latter in *Imagine There's No Woman,* 222–25, 228–29.

39. "C'est ma force de mettre en contact direct le principe de perversion et celui de mon travail" (My strength as an artist lies in the direct contact I have created between the principle of perversion and [that of] my work). Cited in Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion,* 287. While Bellmer's fascination with perversion and sexual desire (which he shared with many surrealists) has been examined at length in the studies of Dourthe, Taylor, Liechtenstein, Green, Paul Ardenne, Peter Webb, Hal Foster, and other critics, there has been little inclination in these writings to see perversion as the unconscious dynamics or abstract machine powering much of the artist's oeuvre. On Bellmer's exploration of perversion see my notes 13 and 22.

40. Bellmer was on friendly terms with Breton, Eluard, Georges Hugnet, Man Ray, Joë Bousquet, Max Ernst, and other surrealists and participated in most of their major exhibitions from 1937 onward. His vision of art as obsessive exploration of transgressive eroticism, perversion, and an experimental, nonnatural body, however, disagreed profoundly with the late romantic idealism found on Breton's and some of his surrealist friends' notions of the surrealist revolution. Bellmer found himself attracted to Bataille's ideas on sex, death, and excess—ideas that Breton rejected. See Dourthe, *Bellmer: Le principe de perversion,* 167–201.

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MARC HAIRSTON

# A Cocoon with a View: *Hikikomori*, Otaku, and *Welcome to the NHK*

All art reflects the culture from which it arises. And while most contemporary anime and manga serve merely as escapism from modern Japanese life—flights of fantasy or romanticism that allow the viewer a short break from the pressures and confinements of school or work—there are a few series that touch on more serious social issues, using the comic relief of the animation or manga medium as a way of facing a painful or uncomfortable subject. An example of the latter type is the anime/manga series *Welcome to the NHK* (*NHK ni yōkoso!*), which takes a darkly comic view of both the rise of the Japanese social phenomenon of *hikikomori*, young people rejecting their role in Japanese society and becoming reclusive shut-ins, and the current *otaku* culture in Japan.[1]

The term *hikikomori* is derived from the Japanese words *hiku* (pulling in) and *komoru* (retiring) and refers both to the syndrome and to the person with the syndrome.[2] In most cases these are young males (although a significant fraction are female) in their teens or twenties who have developed a psychological fear of social interaction with the outside world and who spend all their time in their room at home. In extreme cases, the *hikikomori* refuses even to interact with other family members. This phenomenon was first reported in

the 1990s, and the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare officially recognized the problem in 2001.[3] The cause of this behavior is uncertain, with various psychological and sociological explanations being debated. Some psychologists believe Japan's severe bullying problem in schools is part of the root cause.[4] The Japanese social system, with its Confucian ideal of conformity, results in bullying of students who are seen as different or unable to fit in with the group norm, and if the student sees his or her self-identity as so flawed that they can never join the larger group, then retreating to a solitary existence in their room may appear the only viable option. A sociological explanation can be found in the postbubble economic world of Japan, in which some young people feel hopeless, with no sense of a future for themselves, and become *hikikomori* as an act of rebellion against the pressures to succeed imposed on them by parents and society.[5]

Further, there is the question of just how widespread this phenomenon is. Because being a *hikikomori* is seen as something shameful, something many parents and family members would hide from outsiders, reliable statistics are difficult to obtain. Expert estimates of the total number of current and former *hikikomori* in Japan range from a low of 50,000 to a high of 1.2 million.[6] Part of the problem in determining accurate numbers may arise from how broadly a researcher defines a *hikikomori*. In fact there is a wide range of severity of *hikikomori,* ranging from *futōkō* or "school refusal," in which a student stops attending school but still has social interactions with friends and family, all the way to the hardcore recluse, who has developed behavioral problems and severe psychological phobias about leaving his or her room. Regardless of the exact numbers, the phenomenon is real and has been picked up by the Japanese media as a major social problem and threat to Japan's future. If Japan's future is bleak because of its faltering economy and declining birth rate, a rising number of *hikikomori* will only exacerbate the problem.

The concern about *hikikomori* has echoes of the fear about an earlier marginal group that was propagated by the Japanese media, the otaku. "Otaku" (derived from a Japanese honorific meaning another's person's house or family) was appropriated in the 1980s to refer to obsessive fans, particularly of anime and manga, who were generally loners on the edges of Japanese society.[7] Because these otaku were generally withdrawn, had interests in unconventional subjects, and did not participate in the "normal" Japanese social activities, they were seen by the media as a threat to the cohesive Japanese social structure. The murder of four young girls in 1988 and 1989 by a disturbed young man who was also an anime and manga fan caused some of the media to paint all otaku as dangerous and deviant. But the continuing

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popularity of anime and manga, along with the increasing number of Japanese who are willing to admit they are fans, has brought otaku culture into the mainstream, to the point that Aso Taro, the Japanese Prime Minister from 2008 to 2010, is a self-proclaimed otaku who established the Japanese government's International Manga Award when he was the Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2007.[8] While otaku and *hikikomori* share some similar characteristics, it should be emphasized that there is only a slight overlap between the two groups. Most *hikikomori* are not otaku, and most otaku keep their hobby compartmentalized in their life and are able to spend the rest of their time in normal school or work activities.

Out of this background came the publication in 2002 of the light novel *Welcome to the NHK* by Takimoto Tatsuhiko (Figure 1). A first-person narrative, it covers about a year in the life of Satō Tatsuhiro, a twenty-two-year old *hikikomori* living in a six-mat, one-room apartment in a Tokyo suburb. The author admitted in the novel's afterword that he himself was something of a *hikikomori* and based parts of the book on his own experiences. (Note the similarity of the proper names of the author and the protagonist and that both grew up in Hokkaido before moving to Tokyo.) "Regardless," Takimoto wrote, "it was still painful. It was embarrassing. I felt as though I were taking my own shame and revealing it to the whole world. In the end, I got caught up in paranoid fantasies. *What if everyone is secretly laughing at me while I write this kind of story?* I really thought this."[9]

A dark satire on *hikikomori*, otaku culture, video games, lolicon (*rorikon*), and various other current Japanese social problems, the novel did well enough that in 2004 Takimoto, in collaboration with the manga artist Oiwa Kendi, began a manga series that expanded on the story. The manga ultimately ran for three years and was compiled into eight published volumes. An anime series based on the novel and manga began in July 2006, running six months for a total of twenty-four episodes.[10] The storyline in the anime was based mostly on the novel, with some extra events from the manga added. Both the novel and the anime had the same conclusion but the manga, which finished six months after the final anime broadcast, had a different ending. This essay will primarily focus on the anime series.

The story begins with Satō hiding in his apartment. A quiet loser back in his high school in Hokkaido, he came to Tokyo to attend college four years prior but suffered an anxiety attack while walking to classes and never




**FIGURE 1.** Cover of the Japanese hardback edition of the novel *Welcome to the NHK*. The cover art (by ABe Yoshitoshi) shows Misaki at her part-time job at a manga café.

returned to the college. Since then he sleeps sixteen hours a day, only going out at night to get food from a convenience store and living off the allowance his parents still send him. On this particular day he is in a mildly psychotic state, having conversations with his household appliances (Figure 2). (In the novel and manga this was the result of the mail-order hallucinogenic drugs he frequently takes, a story element that was removed in the anime.) He has a "revelation" that his *hikikomori* state is not his fault but part of a conspiracy

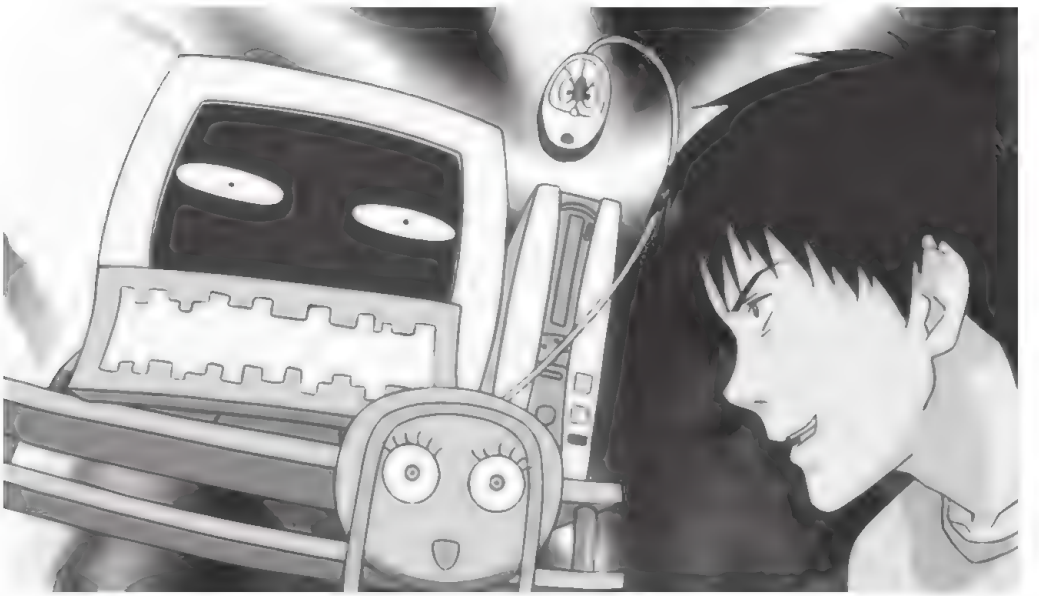


**FIGURE 2.** An image from the anime showing Satou hallucinating talking appliances and furniture in his apartment.

by the Japanese public television network, the NHK, which broadcast high quality anime series "and that planted the seeds of otaku-ness in so many of its viewers! They became socially awkward and ultimately . . . a hikikomori is born!"[11] From that he concludes that the NHK is really a secret organization whose name is not the Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai (Japanese Broadcasting Association) but actually the Nihon Hikikomori Kyōkai (Japanese *Hikikomori* Association), who plan to turn all Japanese youth into *hikikomori*. Satō is not a true otaku, and his own history does not follow the path he described, but this "revelation" allows him to continue blaming his problems on outside forces. He is constantly depressed, living off his parents' indulgence, and unable to break out of his self-imposed cocoon. In an interview, Takimoto described his own typical day when he was a *hikikomori*: "I sleep till I cannot sleep any more, and kill time until I feel sleepy. I try not to think seriously about my future as much as possible."[12] The series covers over a year in Satō's life describing his comic and futile attempts to break out of his *hikikomori* condition.

The second main character in the series is a seventeen-year-old girl, Nakahara Misaki. She meets Satō while accompanying her aunt, a religious zealot who goes door-to-door passing out Christian literature that, coincidentally, warns about the dangers of becoming a *hikikomori*.[13] While Satō goes into a panic attack trying to deal with the two women at his door, Misaki recognizes him as the young man she has seen sitting alone late at night in the park next to her home. The next day she delivers a note to his apartment inviting him

SATŌ DOES NOT CREATE A NEW CHARACTER SO MUCH AS HE JUST REPEATS THE TROPES OF VARIOUS EXISTING *MOE* FEMALE CHARACTERS, COMBINING THEM TOGETHER IN A SINGLE CHARACTER THAT EMPHASIZES JUST HOW FANTASTICALLY UNREAL THESE CHARACTERS ARE.

to meet her that evening in the park. Barely able to work up the nerve to go out, Satō does meet her and finds that she has decided to adopt him as her "project." She recognized him as a *hikikomori* and presents him with a handwritten contract to follow her instructions and guidance to cure him, with a penalty of one million yen if he breaks it. Satō signs it and they begin holding regular evening "counseling" sessions in the park, which continue through most of the series. At first Misaki seems the most normal character in the narrative, but the story reveals that she herself is a *futōkō* who left high school because she could not get along with the other girls. Since middle school she has lived with her uncle and aunt (the religious zealot) because her mother committed suicide when Misaki was very young, leaving her with an abusive alcoholic stepfather who burned her arms with cigarettes. In the novel, she always wears long-sleeved shirts, even in summer, to hide her scars. The anime Misaki also only wears long-sleeved shirts, but the reason is never explained. Instead of focusing on her own problems, she has chosen Satō as someone in worse shape than she, believing that if she can cure him it will improve her own low self-esteem.

The next character in the story is Satō's new next-door neighbor, Yamazaki Kaoru, who Satō first meets when he finally works up the nerve to complain about the loud anime music he plays incessantly. It turns out that Yamazaki was Satō's *kōhai* (underclassman) back in high school, two years his junior, and someone Satō had first met when he tried to stop a group of bullies from beating up Yamazaki. Yamazaki *is* a true otaku and his escapades with Satō satirize the otaku culture. He came to Tokyo to attend a trade school for artists who want to work in the anime, manga, and game industry. Like Satō, his dreams exceed his abilities and he is increasingly frustrated at his lack of success in either his classwork or with the women in his classes. Desperate to impress Misaki that he is actually self-employed and not a *hikikomori*, Satō begs Yamazaki to let him help with a project. Together they set out to create the only thing two amateurs could possibly make, an *erogee* (erotic game). However, since Satō has little experience with *erogee* (much less any real-life relationships), Yamazaki takes him on a tour of Akihabara, the retail center of anime, manga, game shops, and maid cafés, in order to get him to think like an otaku. During lunch Satō is inspired to create the perfect female

character for their *erogee*: "She's your childhood friend/classmate/next-door neighbor! But the thing is, she's a robot, and not only that, she's also a maid! What's more, she was the main character's girlfriend in his previous life! But the truth is that she's a ghost! Not only that, she's an alien! But her real identity turns out to be the reincarnation of a fox from space!" Excited, Yamazaki draws an image of this character only to have Satō tear up the drawing as too "out of control" (episode 4). The satire here is of the whole *moe* (budding) phenomenon of anime characters, the ideal female archetypes in anime, manga, and games that cause male otaku to fall in love with them. Satō does not create a new character so much as he just repeats the tropes of various existing *moe* female characters, combining them together in a single character that emphasizes just how fantastically unreal these characters are. Throughout the series Yamazaki covers up his own wounds about being rejected by women by telling Satō how much better the imaginary two-dimension anime/manga women are. During their Akihabara shopping trip, Yamazaki goes crazy, buying merchandise from his favorite anime, the fictitious *Puru Puru Pururin* series, even buying a full-sized body pillow with an image of the series' young catgirl character on it (Figure 3). The lolicon phenomenon of idealizing and sexualizing young girls is shown as just another step in the unreal objectification of fantasy women by otaku like Yamazaki.



**FIGURE 3.** An image from the anime showing Satō (right) and Yamazaki in a manga shop in Akihabara. Yamazaki is carrying a body pillow with the anime catgirl *Pururin* from the fictitious show *Puru Puru Pururin* on it.

Later in the series the gaming world is satirized when Satō decides he can make money playing online multiplayer role games, winning the virtual gold and prizes there and then selling them for real money to other online players. Despite Yamazaki's protests that he does not have the skills to succeed, Satō feels this is the ideal occupation for a *hikikomori*—he does not have to leave his apartment nor deal with real people, just with computer avatars of real people. Over the course of a month Satō becomes obsessed with the game and infatuated with another player, Mia (whose avatar is a beautiful catgirl), who takes a special interest in him. But his dreams are shattered when Yamazaki reveals that he is "Mia," deliberately doing this to fool Satō, to show him that online friendship is just another illusion. Pointing out that Satō has passed his initial free trial period of the game and now owes money, Yamazaki explains, "the ones who make the most money are the people who create the games! A game isn't something to play! It's something to create!" (episode 16). Satō returns to helping Yamazaki with their *erogee,* but it too is a failure when they are unable to sell it to other fans at the Winter Comiket. At the end of the series, Yamazaki's father becomes ill, forcing him to give up his dreams of being a game creator and return to take over the family farm in Hokkaido. Ironically, once there he finally finds a cute girl who falls in love with and marries him.

The next main character is Kashiwa Hitomi, Satō's *senpai* (upperclassman) from high school who is one year his senior and through which the series looks at the current drug problems and the question of women's roles in Japan. In high school the two of them were the only members of the school's literature club and spent most afternoons in the club room playing cards and discussing her ideas on conspiracy theories, thus planting the seeds of all the conspiracy ideas that Satō creates throughout the series. Despite Satō's crush on her, they never date, but she does have sex with him one time just before her graduation, after which she leaves for college in Tokyo. Satō views her as the long-lost unrequited love of his past. In the series he meets up with her accidentally after his trip to Akihabara and finds she has graduated from a well-regarded college and gotten a job as a civil servant in the Japanese government. While this is generally regarded as a prestigious position (or at least a very secure one), for Hitomi it has become a dead end. Although bright and capable, her work and ideas are ignored by her superiors, and in her frustration she has turned to abusing prescription pills (some of which she offers Satō to help his *hikikomori* behavior). She is currently engaged to another government worker, but the relationship is uncertain, as her fiancé tends to ignore her because of his own work. Later she contacts Satō as she is leaving on a group vacation to an island, and Satō joins her thinking he can still strike

up the romance with her they never had. Only when they reach the island does Satō discover the group is planning a joint suicide they had arranged online, and he is torn between stopping them and joining them. The suicides are foiled when Hitomi's fiancé, Yamazaki, and Misaki show up. Ultimately Hitomi does get married and at the end of series we find she is now a happy mother.

IT IS MISAKI WHO IS AT SATŌ'S SIDE THROUGHOUT THE SERIES, FOLLOWING HIM THROUGH ALL HIS TRIALS AND FAILED SCHEMES. HER COUNSELING SESSIONS ARE LITTLE MORE THAN LECTURES AND INSPIRATIONAL APHORISMS, BUT SHE PROVIDES HIM WITH THE HUMAN CONTACT HE NEEDS TO COME OUT OF HIS SHELL.

The final major character is (again) another classmate from Satō's high school, Kobayashi Megumi, who was the class representative of his homeroom. Her story satirizes the situation of the Japanese job market for young professionals in post-Bubble Japan. She contacts him out of the blue halfway through the series, and when she finds out he is a *hikikomori,* she offers to introduce him to her mentor, who may be able to help him. But the mentor turns out to be the head of a pyramid scheme involving natural foods and products, and Kobayashi plays on Satō's weak personality to recruit him as a new member. She explains how she had moved to Tokyo to attend college and live with her older brother, but when their father died unexpectedly she was forced out into the workforce without a degree. After working a series of dead-end jobs, she concludes the only solution is to stop being a victim and join the side of the exploiters. With promises of being one of the winners, she convinces Satō to follow her by joining as a member of the buying club. When Misaki and Yamazaki go with Satō to cancel his membership, Kobayashi offers them a deal on some "members-only" nutritional supplements that will "cure" Satō's *hikikomori* condition and improve the others' lives, and ends up with two more new members. Ultimately they succeed in canceling all three memberships, but the irony is that Kobayashi originally joined the marketing scheme to support her older brother, who is an extreme *hikikomori,* unable to leave his room and completely dependent on her for food and support. At the end of this story arc, the marketing scam is closed by the police, and Kobayashi disappears for several days (presumably under arrest), forcing her starving brother to leave their house for the first time in years. Begging for food at a small mom-and-pop noodle shop, he is put to work as a delivery person, a job he does quite well. The story implies that at least some *hikikomori* can be cured with tough love and being kicked out of their nest.

But it is Misaki who is at Satō's side throughout the series, following him through all his trials and failed schemes. It is her counseling that initially forces him out of his apartment and gradually enables him to function outside during the daytime. Her counseling sessions are little more than lectures and inspirational aphorisms, but she provides him with the human contact he needs to come out of his shell. When his mother comes to Tokyo to check on him, Misaki pretends to be Satō's girlfriend to reassure his mother his life is fine. After his allowance is cut, she regularly brings him food to make sure he is eating properly. Even when he pushes her away during his online gaming obsession, she comes to his apartment dressed as a catgirl and a maid thinking that would get his attention. Satō is attracted to her from the beginning but is never able to admit it to himself. Even in the penultimate episode, when Misaki gives him a graduation contract that states she will always like him and he always will like her, he rejects it. With his own self-esteem so low, he cannot believe a younger and attractive girl would care about him. And that is one of the central questions throughout the series: why does Misaki devote so much energy to rescuing Satō? Misaki is dysfunctional herself, so she takes on Satō as a project to salvage her own low self-esteem. This is stated most clearly when she stops Satō from jumping off a cliff with the suicide group: "You're the first person I've ever found who's so much more of a throwaway hunk of refuse than me! I need you Satō! I absolutely need you!" (episode 13).

With these characters and situations, *Welcome to the NHK* is the type of series that might result if the novelist Murakami Haruki created an anime. Murakami's novels, such as *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World, Kafka on the Shore,* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* center around main characters who are also wounded loners, cut off from the larger social structure of Japan. In *Hardboiled Wonderland,* the unnamed main character is a "calcultec," a loner and technician who encrypts data in his mind for secure storage, who becomes involved in the discovery of a vast conspiracy to destroy the calcultecs. In *Kafka on the Shore,* the main character is fifteen-year-old Kafka, a loner from a broken home with an abusive father. Running away from home, he takes refuge by hiding in a library. Here again is the theme of withdrawing from the world, shutting oneself off from the pressures of society in order to save one's mental self. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is probably closest in tone to *Welcome to the NHK.* The main character is Okada Toru, who has lost both his job and his wife and who withdraws into his house to puzzle out why all this has happened to him. He is passive like Satō, letting events come to him rather than trying to affect them (though that changes by the

end of the novel). Again Murakami presents themes of trying to find larger meanings in events and questioning whether they are random or part of a larger shadowy conspiracy. In the middle of his self-imposed isolation, Okada strikes up a bizarre friendship with Kasahara May, a teenaged *futōkō* who is living with her parents. They have playful philosophical conversations about death and despair that sound very much like Satō and Misaki's counseling discussions. Like Murakami's characters, Satō and Misaki are intelligent but too different to fit into the norms of rigid Japanese society. All these characters are searching for ways to make their uniqueness work for them but find themselves trapped.

After Satō rejects Misaki's graduation contract, he cuts off contact with her and is finally forced into part-time work to pay for his food and rent. A few weeks later he finds out that Misaki has attempted suicide and is hospitalized. Going to her hospital, he finds only a suicide note and a train schedule to her hometown on the Sea of Japan. He realizes that she is planning to jump off of the same cliff on a sea cape where her mother jumped. (Another irony here is that *misaki* means "cape" and that her biological father named her after this particular cape.) Spending the last of his savings, he buys an express train ticket to the same location and arrives at the cape only five minutes behind her. In the moonlit snowy night Misaki tells him she must kill herself because she only brings misfortune to all her family and friends. He tries repeating the platitudes she taught him and telling her he needs her, but none of that breaks her resolve. Remembering she once told him that if she could believe a God exists, then she could blame all her problems on Him, Satō tells her that it is not her fault: all her miseries are caused by the powerful, evil conspiracy, the NHK. The initials can stand for anything, but in Misaki's case they stand for Nihon Hikan Kyōkai (Japan Pessimists Association). He explains that now he has revealed their secret, the NHK will try and kill him, but if he kills himself first then he will have defeated it and Misaki will be saved to live a happy life. Hallucinating a giant NHK monster rising from the sea, he runs towards it and the cliff's edge, Satō finally realizes that he must truly love Misaki in order to do this. "I'm about to die for Misaki, the girl I love!" he thinks as he leaps. "It's the ultimate in 'dramatic,' don't you think?!" (episode 24).

Of course, just like everything else he has attempted in the series, Satō fails. Misaki reaches the edge of the cliff in time to see him land on the chain-link safety netting that the government installed below the cliff to prevent suicides, and the story jumps a few months to spring. Satō is still working part-time and has resumed his friendship with Misaki, except now he is tutoring her to pass her college entrance exams. After one of their evening




**FIGURE 4.** Misaki in the final scene of the anime series.

tutorials, she presents him with one more contract to sign: the formation of the Nihon Hitojichi Kōkankai (Japan Hostage Exchange Club). "Each member offers their life as a hostage to the other," Misaki tells him. "In short, it says 'If you die, I'll die too, you scoundrel!' . . . [so] even if one wants to die, they won't be able to" (episode 24). Unable to deny his feelings for Misaki anymore, Satō ruefully signs it. Misaki happily picks up the agreement and delivers the final line of the series to Satō: "Welcome to the N.H.K." (episode 24) (Figure 4).

It is not exactly the happiest ending in all of anime, but for two personalities as wounded as Satō and Misaki, this is probably the best possible outcome. Satō admits to himself, "In the end, not a single one of our problems has been solved. From here on, too, we'll probably be whispering 'I can't, I can't' every day while we go on living" (episode 24), but they're still willing to give it a try. It is actually a fairly encouraging ending for its audience of *hikikomori* and the society that produced them as both struggle toward a solution. It echoes what Takimoto said when asked what advice he would give his fellow *hikikomori*, the other "members of the NHK": "Try your best so that you do not die."[14]

Satō and Misaki's situation may be desperate, but it is not entirely hopeless. They have made the first step in building a relationship, in reaching out beyond themselves. Despite forming the Nihon Hitojichi Kōkankai, neither one can yet admit their love for the other, but they have started trusting

each other, willing to admit they *need* each other, and that is a start. Satō is no longer a *hikikomori.* He has finally escaped from his cocoon, and there is a glimmer of hope that there may yet be a butterfly in his future. Or at least a moth.[15]

## Notes

I wish to thank Dr. Pamela Gossin, Dr. Watanabe Yuki, and Dr. Ito Nobutoshi for their help with this paper.

1. Maggie Jones, "Shutting Themselves In," *The New York Times Magazine,* January 15, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15japanese.html (accessed December 2008).

2. Micheal Zielenziger, *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2006), 17.

3. Ibid., 47.

4. Ibid., 52–54.

5. Jones, "Shutting Themselves In," 2–3.

6. The lower number is cited by Tim Larimer in "Natural-Born Killers?" *Time,* August 28, 2000. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,997801,00.html (accessed December 2008). Zielenziger consistently favors the higher figure (*Shutting Out the Sun,* 60).

7. A concise introduction to otaku culture and history can be found in Melek Ortabasi, "National History as Otaku Fantasy: Satoshi Kon's *Millennium Actress,*" in *Japanese Visual Culture,* ed. Mark W. Williams, 274–94 (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2008).

8. Martin Flacker, "Japan's Governing Party Picks New Leader," *New York Times,* September 23, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/23/world/asia/23japan-1.html?scp=9&sq=&st=nyt (accessed December 2008).

9. Takimoto Tatsuhiko, *Welcome to the NHK* (TokyoPop, 2007), 231–32.

10. All three versions are available in English translation. Takimoto Tatsuhiko and Oiwa Kendi, *Welcome to the NHK,* vols. 1–8 (Los Angeles, TokyoPop, 2006–2008); Anime: *Welcome to the NHK,* Season One, Part One, DVD (Funimation, 2008), and *Welcome to the NHK,* Season One, Part Two, DVD (Funimation, 2008). "Oiwa Kendi" is an alternative romanization for Ōiwa Kenji.

11. Takimoto and Oiwa, *Welcome to the NHK,* 1: 21.

12. Takimoto Tatsuhiko's Web blog about *Welcome to the NHK,* July 7, 2007, http://www.boiledeggs.com/nhk/nhkinfo.html (accessed May 2009).

13. The religious group is a thinly disguised version of the Japanese Jehovah's Witnesses. In the novel, their magazine is entitled *Awaken!* (24) instead of *Awake!* and the group meets in an "Imperial Hall" (147) instead of a "Kingdom Hall."

14. Takimoto, Web blog.

15. As a final joke, a limited edition of the last volume of the manga in Japan included a mock diploma stating that Satō had graduated from being a *hikikomori.* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welcome_to_the_NHK (accessed December 2008).

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**NAITŌ CHIZUKO**
*Translated by Nathan Shockey*

# Reorganizations of Gender and Nationalism: Gender Bashing and Loliconized Japanese Society

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Naitō Chizuko is associate professor of modern and contemporary Japanese literature and media in the Faculty of Language and Literature at Ōtsuma University in Tokyo. Her critically acclaimed book *Teikoku to ansatsu: Jendaa kara miru kindai Nihon no media hensei* (2005, Empires and Assassinations: Gender and the organization of modern Japanese media through gender) was awarded the Women's History Prize. In that study, Naitō draws on her extensive archival research to produce a stunning indictment of the modern Japanese media's storytelling practices and collusion with state aggression and authoritarianism in structural discrimination and oppression. The text that follows pursues many of the same issues and links them with Naitō's interest in contemporary women authors through a discussion of Shōno Yoriko.[1]

Naitō's research interests also extend to other contemporary women authors, such as Matsuura Rieko and Mizumura Minae, as well as topics including media and literary representations of women's bodies, Ainu, colonies, anarchists, socialists, and infectious disease. She is a founding member of

the Mars Club (Kasei Kurabu), a collective of women scholars working on contemporary Japanese fiction.[2] Naitō addresses differential power and the politics of representation in the classroom as well. While many of her courses focus on modern and contemporary Japanese literature and media, she has also taught comparative media studies courses, such as one on the *Star Trek* series and U.S. imperialism.

## REORGANIZATIONS OF GENDER AND NATIONALISM: GENDER BASHING AND LOLICONIZED JAPANESE SOCIETY

In Japan today, an increasing number of books are published on the subject of "gender bashing," and the word *gender* itself has been subjected to escalating acts of "bashing." In this paper, I discuss the ways in which "gender bashing" and "loliconized society" (*rorikonka suru shakai*) are tied to contemporary Japanese neonationalism. To begin, I would like to examine the current state of gender bashing and neonationalism in Japan by drawing on the arguments made in the book *Jendā furī toraburu* (2005, Gender-free trouble), a cross-sectional inspection of the current state of gender issues in Japan.[3] The book was edited by Kimura Ryōko and borrows its title from Judith Butler's 1990 study *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.*[4]

Following the United Nations' 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, Japan revised its laws to incorporate the conference's resolutions on correcting gender disparities.[5] The gender bashing taking place today can be seen as a backlash against these developments. "Radical" sexual education and "gender-free education" (*jendā furī kyōiku*) have been made the targets of attack by conservative factions, who have gone on to make "gender studies" (*jendā sutadīzu*; *jendā gaku*) itself into a target of criticism.

In Japan, the term "gender" (*jendā*) first became widespread through use of the term "gender-free education." This term, based on Barbara Houston's 1985 article "Should Public Education Be Gender Free?"[6] and first used by the Tokyo Women's Foundation, indicates a freedom from gender bias in education. The use of the term "gender free" was at first localized in public offices, but it was soon pointed out to be a "Japanese English" (*wasei eigo*) term that deviates from standard English grammar. Moreover, as "gender free" is a "bureaucratic" term, many Japanese gender studies researchers elect not to use it. Nonetheless, the term "gender free" has become broadly known through its use in the educational field and in the media, and many feminist studies

scholars approve of the term's aim to rectify the structures of gender discrimination in the educational system.

A NUMBER OF DIET MEMBERS FROM THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAVE ARGUED THAT "*GENDER* IS A BAD WORD AND GENDER STUDIES SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM UNIVERSITY CURRICULUMS."

In response to this movement to advance gender equality in the educational field, many conservative groups have self-righteously circulated falsehoods that "gender-free education completely negates the differences between men and women, and is a dangerous idea with the potential to destroy the traditional culture and family structure of Japan," and argued that gender-free education means "ignoring the differences between boys and girls and allowing them to change clothes in the same room." Such attacks have escalated, and a number of Diet members from the Liberal Democratic Party have argued that "*gender* is a bad word and gender studies should be removed from university curriculums."

We can view these phenomena as an indication of the ways in which gender bashing is bound to xenophobic nationalism, behind which lie the linked structures of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. It can be argued that this configuration shares similarities with the power structure in place during the period of gender bashing that occurred in America during the 1990s, when conservative groups attacked what they called "radical sexual education." Those conservative groups advocated an extremely austere sexual education program, and neoconservative factions proclaimed at the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing that "gender" will "destroy the family and morality." The methods being used by "bashing" groups in Japan structurally resemble some of the techniques used by American Christian fundamentalists, as the primary technique of local assemblymen and Diet members has been to work together with financially linked media groups and magazines to disseminate the idea that "gender-free education means boys and girls changing clothes in the same room."

The connections between neonationalism and gender bashing become all the more clear when one considers the movements of these conservative factions to revise the Constitution. The policies of the Liberal Democratic party include efforts to revise Article 9 of the Constitution and its "Resignation of War" (*sensō hōki*) clause,[7] to reassess the question of equality between men and women in the home through the revision of Article 24,[8] and to rewrite Article 25 to shift social security from federal to public control.[9] These three aims are closely interrelated. Essentially, the party's goal is to cut the national welfare budget, burden women with unpaid labor, and allow men to

be sent off to war as soldiers. It is clear that the party's views resonate with those of the conservative movement in America, and that the goal of these factions is to create a Japanese society in possession of the ability to wage war alongside America.

## DESIRE IN A LOLICONIZED SOCIETY

To state my conclusion in advance, when we take the question of sexuality into account, we can see that the "loliconization" of Japanese society functions in tandem with the phenomena of gender bashing and nationalism. So what role does desire play within this loliconizing society?

I use the term "loliconization phenomenon" (*lolikonka genshō*) to indicate the commodification of children, young girls (*shōjo*), and young women as sexual symbols in society. The term is derived from "Lolita complex," which was originally used as a general term to indicate pedophiliac sexual desire. In contemporary Japan, its abbreviation "lolicon" (*rorikon*) has become widespread due in part to its connection with otaku culture, and it no longer represents any one particular sexual preference or predilection. Essentially, the term "lolicon" has been standardized to represent societal desire in a broader sense.

In order to discuss some of the problems inherent in this structure of loliconic desire, I want to explain some of the causes and effects of such a phenomenon. Japan is faced with the quickly escalating problems of a rapidly aging society with a low birthrate (*shōshikōreika*), in which people are marrying in increasingly fewer numbers. In her book *The Condition of Marriage* (2002, *Kekkon no jōken*), the feminist thinker Ogura Chikako posits the explanation that a woman's right to make her own marriage decisions has become essentially guaranteed following the apparent end of the patriarchal family system.[10] Since both men and women can now afford to be selective about whom they marry, the number of people who want to marry but are unable to find partners has increased. Thus, given the legitimation of the woman's will, many men find themselves unable to open channels of communication with members of the opposite sex. When the privilege of men to express their own will is negated, the symbol of "woman" (*josei*) as a commodity property circulated among men comes to be replaced with the proxy symbol of the "young girl" (*shōjo*). Once the positions of the symbols of "woman" and "young girl" are reversed, the young girl is, through her youthful innocence, made to lack a will of her own, and the ideals and delusions of the male gender can be freely projected into

the empty vacuum of the interiority of the symbol of the "young girl." In other words, such a symbol possesses an extremely favorable set of conditions for the expression of masculinized desire.

NATIONAL IDENTITY ITSELF CONTAINS A BLANK VOID, AND IT IS THUS NECESSARY TO FIND AN "OTHER" (TASHA) TO FILL IT WITH MEANING.

One of the main problems that arise from this situation is a structure of sexual commodification that has increasingly come to envelop the youth of today. The flip side of this process is a rise in age discrimination among women that has been steadily growing stronger as the notion that older women have no commodity value takes hold. A further problem arises from the communication insufficiencies of the male gender. As a result of Japan's sustained economic recession, the number of freeters (*furītā*) and NEETs (*nīto*, an abbreviation for "Not in Employment, Education, or Training") has increased.[11] As Eve Sedgwick points out in her 1985 book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,* the homosocial bond between men has been severed, and the male gender becomes divided in two—a dualism is created between the male as authority figure and the marginalized male.[12] Within the marginalized male group in Japan, a shared notion of victimization has arisen, which, through the Internet, has become bonded to a violent logic that posits itself as "anti-feminazi" (*"anchi feminachi"*). Members of the (predominantly young) marginalized male group come to experience a sense of loss stemming from their lack of identity as full-fledged members of society (*shakaijin*) in possession of male authority, an identity that in the past had been given to men by their companies.[13] This sense of loss prevents these marginalized males from being able to properly communicate with others, and the male gender is left with nothing but a void created by this accumulated sense of lack. A structure then arises in which men draw on national identity in order to fill the identity void they feel within themselves.

However, this national identity itself contains a blank void, and it is thus necessary to find an "other" (*tasha*) to fill it with meaning. This is the same construction as that which the Japanese empire used to symbolically affirm itself through the negation of its colonies in a process closely resembling the one described in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).[14] Women, resident Koreans (*zainichi korian*), and those with weak academic backgrounds come to represent such a necessary "other," and Internet bashing directed at those groups has become increasingly fierce at the same time it has metastasized onto criticism of leftist groups. Thus we can see the deep relationship between Japanese neonationalism, gender bashing, and the loliconization phenomenon within this social structure.

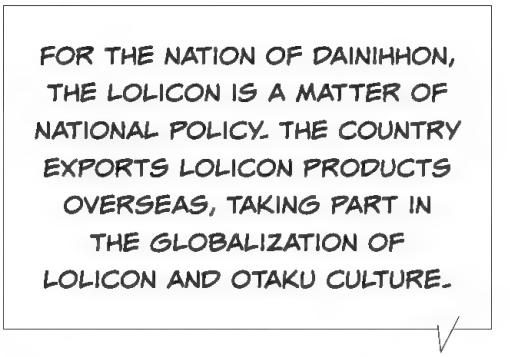
## SHŌNO YORIKO'S CRITIQUE OF THE LOLICON

In order to think critically about these social phenomena and how they are dealt with in the realm of literature, I would like turn to the works of Shōno Yoriko (1956– ), as I think that her novels offer us possibilities to help us better understand the present situation. Shōno Yoriko is held in very high critical regard in Japan, and in her writings she consistently deals with the problems of the relationship between the nation-state and the self, most recently through a critique of the lolicon as a major theoretical problematic.

Shōno's 2003 work, *Suishōnai seido* (System in a crystal)[15] draws on the myths of Izumo (*Izumokei shinwa*) and is set in an imaginary state within Japan called "Uramizumo."[16] The myths of Izumo have been largely purged from the orthodox Shinto canon in favor of the myths of Ise Shinto (*Isekei Shintō*) that were used to support the Great Japanese Empire (*Dainippon Teikoku*). In the novel, Uramizumo is a country of all women, a country from which men are banished. In Uramizumo, whose economy is based on nuclear power, men are discriminated against in favor of a doctrine of "dirty feminism" (*kittanai feminizumu*). By reversing the gender structure of contemporary Japan, the novel depicts the mechanisms of discrimination through the techniques of visual burlesque. In the novel, a female writer is brought to Uramizumo from Japan in order to write the country's national mythology, but she instead criticizes the state's system of discrimination and the uneasiness she feels within it.

Besides nuclear power, Uramizumo's other primary national resource is data on young girls, which it exports to Japan. This imaginary Japan is described only generally in *Suishōnai seido,* but in Shōno's 2006 work, *Dainihhon Ontako meiwakushi* (Dainihhon: the troublesome history of Ontako), she depicts Japan in much greater detail as the nation of "Dainihhon."[17] This Dainihhon references *Dainippon Teikoku* (The Great Empire of Japan), the name of the Japanese empire as created during the Meiji Period and used from 1889 to 1945. The only difference between the names is that in Shōno's novel the voiced consonant of the *po* of *Nippon* is removed to give the sound *ho* instead. "*Ontako*" consists of the word *tako,* meaning octopus, preceded by the honorific prefix *on*. Although the term *tako* seems to take on spiritual significance in the novel, octopi in Japan have no particular religious meaning, and the title can be read as a kind of humorous wordplay.

For the nation of Dainihhon, the lolicon is a matter of national policy. The country exports lolicon products overseas, taking part in the globalization of lolicon and otaku culture. Dainihhon also maintains a colony, "Mars"


FOR THE NATION OF DAINIHHON, THE LOLICON IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL POLICY. THE COUNTRY EXPORTS LOLICON PRODUCTS OVERSEAS, TAKING PART IN THE GLOBALIZATION OF LOLICON AND OTAKU CULTURE.

(*kasei*), where it creates a "Martian girls red-light district" where young girls are commodified and abused. These policies are opposed by a religious group known as The Church of Mitako (*Mitakokyō*); the national government of Dainihhon intentionally misreads the first character in the group's name, *mi*, as *on*, thus dubbing them The Church of Ontako (*Ontakokyō*). By continually referring to the Mitako as Ontako, the nation-state attempts to negate the existence of the group, in the end deeming themselves to be Ontako and usurping the existence of the Mitako group. This Ontako group includes people such as Itō Hirobumi,[18] Yamagata Aritomo,[19] Koizumi Junichirō,[20] and Karatani Kōjin.[21] These figures all possess the authority to define themselves as victims and as minorities, and in doing so prevent the recognition and representation of actual minority groups.

Through this overstated caricaturization of the Ontako-run nation of Dainihhon, Shōno depicts the power structure of contemporary Japan. Some may doubt the validity of a critique based on the resistance of the religious Mitakokyō group, but such a critique is deeply bound to the symbolic role of the emperor system in post-1945 Japan. The emperor system operates as a kind of invisible religion that maintains the capacity to support individual identity; this system is dealt with in Hoshino Tomoyuki's 2004 novel *Lonely Hearts Killer* (*Lonrī hātsu kirā*).[22]

The works of Shōno Yoriko problematize a cultural system that renders minorities as unseen and invisible. By making this system itself visible, Shōno's writing produces unique and individual responses in each reader. Her novels provide opportunities for readers to understand their own "minoritiness" (*mainoritisei*) and thus gain an intellectual understanding of what it means to be a minority. Although Shōno Yoriko's work can seem difficult and obscure, her novels are valuable works of literature in their attempts to dissimilate the desire of a loliconized society and urge radical changes in consciousness.

## Notes

[Thanks to Adrienne Carey Hurley for biographical information on Chizuko. —Eds.]

1. This article had its origins in a talk originally given at "New Nationalisms: An East Asian Writers' Symposium" held at the University of Iowa on February 24, 2006.

2. See the Mars Club Web site at http://www007.upp.so-net.ne.jp/kaseiclub/index.html (accessed June 8, 2009).

3. Kimura Ryōko, ed., *Jendā furī toraburu* (Gender-free trouble) (Tokyo: Hakutakusha, 2005).

4. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

5. [The resolutions of the conference, held in September 1995, include in part the determination to "take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child and remove all obstacles to gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women."—Trans.]

6. Barbara Houston, "Should Public Education Be Gender Free?" in Lynda Stone, ed., *The Education Feminism Reader,* 122–34 (New York: Routledge, 1994).

7. [Article 9 reads, in part: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."—Trans.]

8. [Article 24 reads, in part: "Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis."—Trans.]

9. [Section Two of Article 25 reads: "In all spheres of life, the State shall use its endeavors for the promotion and extension of social welfare and security, and of public health."—Trans.]

10. Ogura Chikako, *Kekkon no jōken* (The condition of marriage) (Osaka: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2002).

11. [The term *freeter* has become a popular buzzword in recent social discourse in Japan. The term is derived from the English *free* and the German *arbeiter,* referring to someone who is not on a career path but instead takes a series of light, part-time jobs.—Trans.]

12. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

13. [The term *shakaijin* is generally used to refer to full-time company employees, in contrast to freeters, who are flexible laborers.—Trans.]

14. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

15. Shōno Yoriko, *Suishōnai seido* (System in a crystal) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2003).

16. [The name "Uramizumo" appears to be a combination of the word *urami,* meaning grudge or ill will, and the proper name Izumo, evoking feelings of anger and vengeance in the place-name itself.—Trans.]

17. Shōno Yoriko, *Dainihhon, Ontako meiwakushi* (Dainihhon: the troublesome history of Ontako) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2006). In 2007, Shōno published a follow-up novel, *Dainihhon, Ronchiku ogeretsuki* (Dainihhon: a vulgar record of the land of beastly logic) (Tokyo: Kōdansha 2007), and completed the trilogy in 2008 with *Dainihhon, roriribe shindekeroku* (Dainihhon: a fuck-off-and-die account of loliconized liberalism) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2008).

18. [Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) was the first prime minister of Japan following the drafting of the Meiji Constitution in 1889. He served as prime minister four separate times, including during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), which he strongly supported. Following Japan's victory, he negotiated the treaty of Shimonoseki, in which Taiwan became a Japanese colony. Itō also served as the first resident general of Korea,

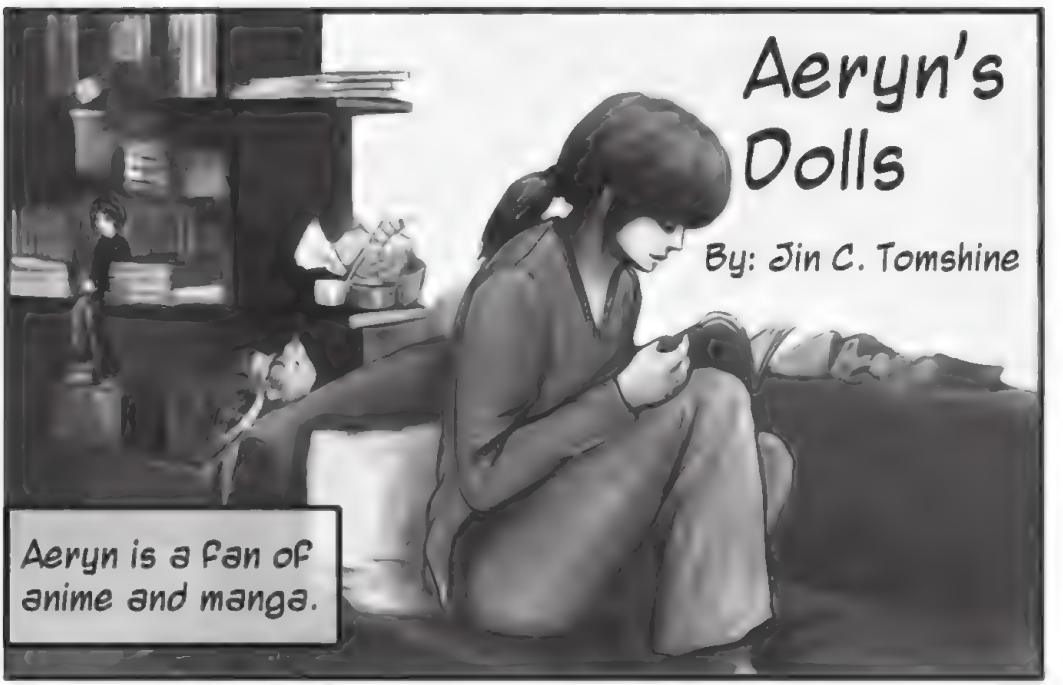
beginning after the Japanese occupation of Korea following the Russo-Japanese war. He was assassinated in Harbin, Manchuria in 1909 by a Korean nationalist.—Trans.]

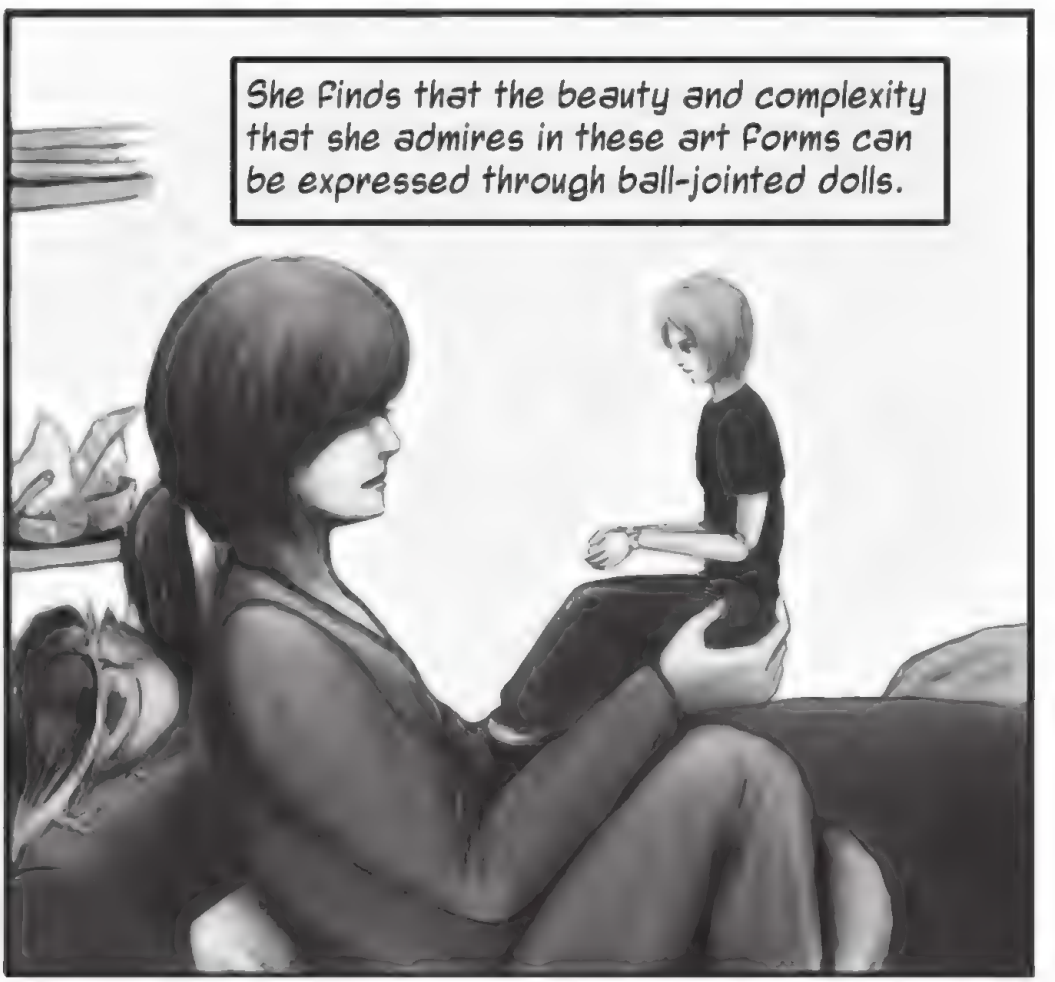
19. [Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922) was the fourth prime minister of Japan, and the first following the establishment of the Imperial Diet. He is sometimes referred to as the father of the modern Japanese army thanks to his role in researching and adapting European military techniques, his role as the first war minister of Japan, and his role in the suppression of the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877.—Trans.]

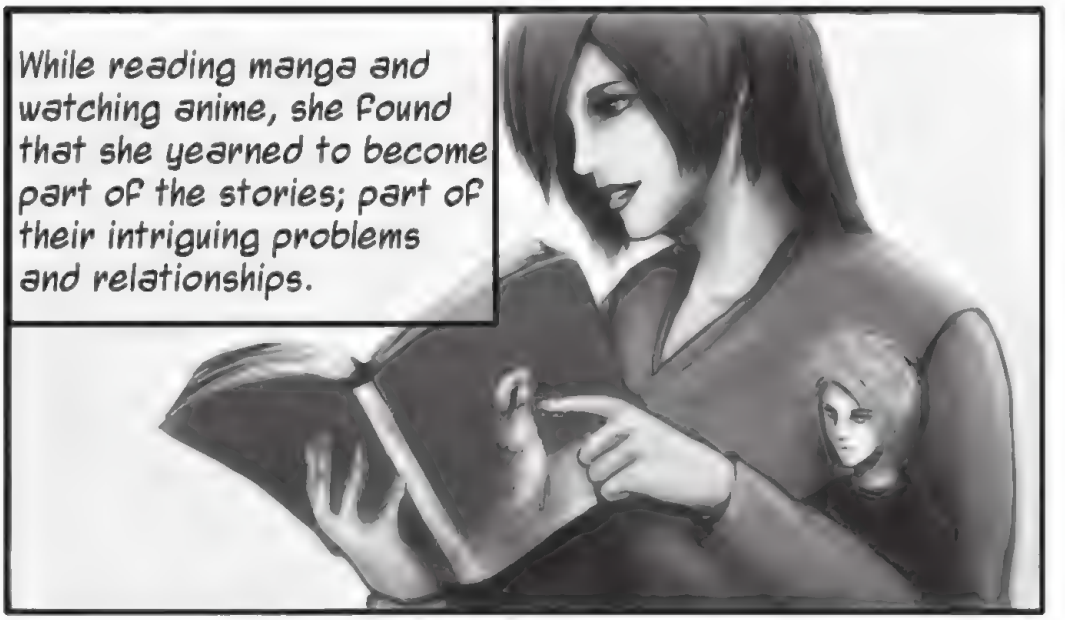
20. [Koizumi Jun'ichirō (1942– ) served as prime minister of Japan from 2001 to 2006.—Trans.]

21. [Karatani Kōjin (1941– ) is a well-known Japanese literary critic and theorist perhaps best known abroad for his books *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1980, *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen*), *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money* (1995, originally published in English), and *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (2001, *Toransukuritīku: Kanto to Marukusu*).—Trans.]

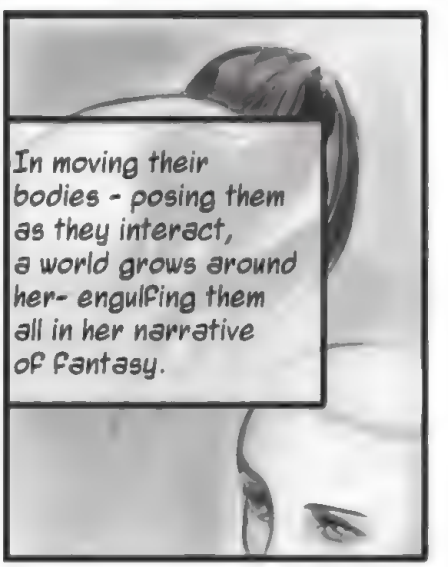
22. Hoshino, Tomoyuki, *Lonrī hātsu kirā* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2004); translated by Adrienne Hurley as *Lonely Hearts Killer* (Oakland, Calif.: PM Press, 2009).

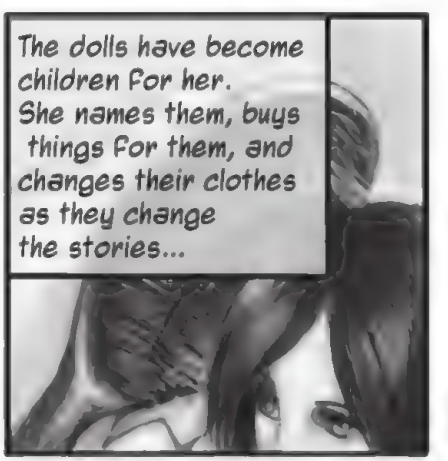

Aeryn's Dolls
By: Jin C. Tomshine
Aeryn is a fan of anime and manga.

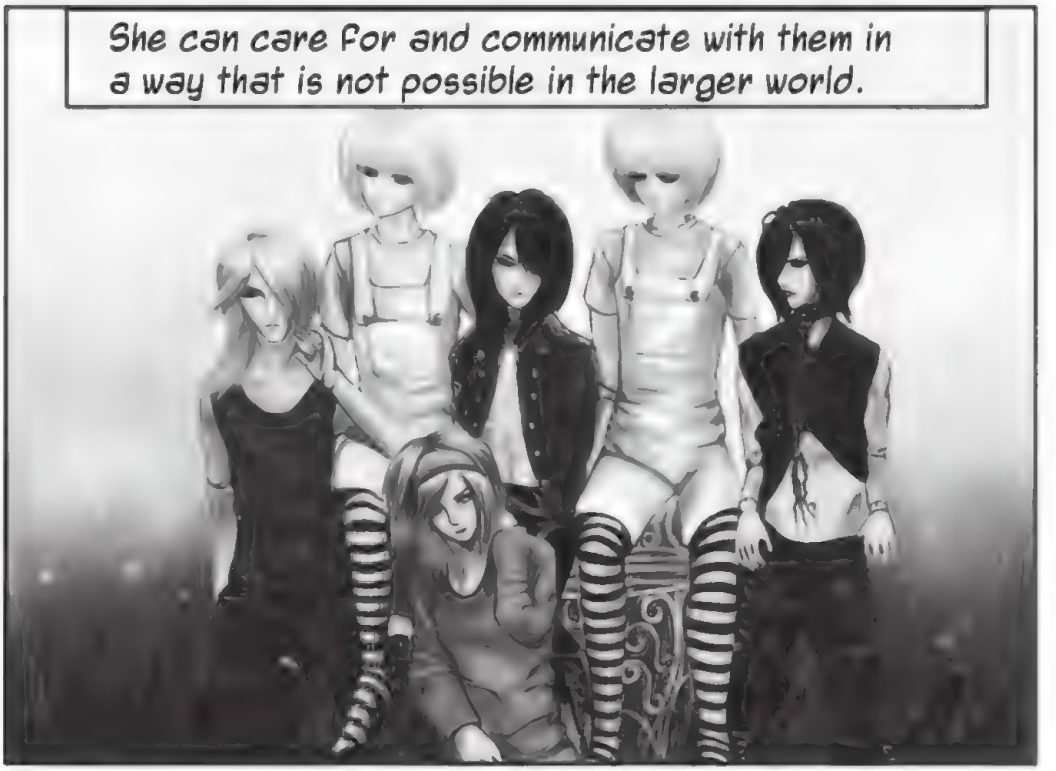

She finds that the beauty and complexity that she admires in these art forms can be expressed through ball-jointed dolls.


While reading manga and watching anime, she found that she yearned to become part of the stories; part of their intriguing problems and relationships.

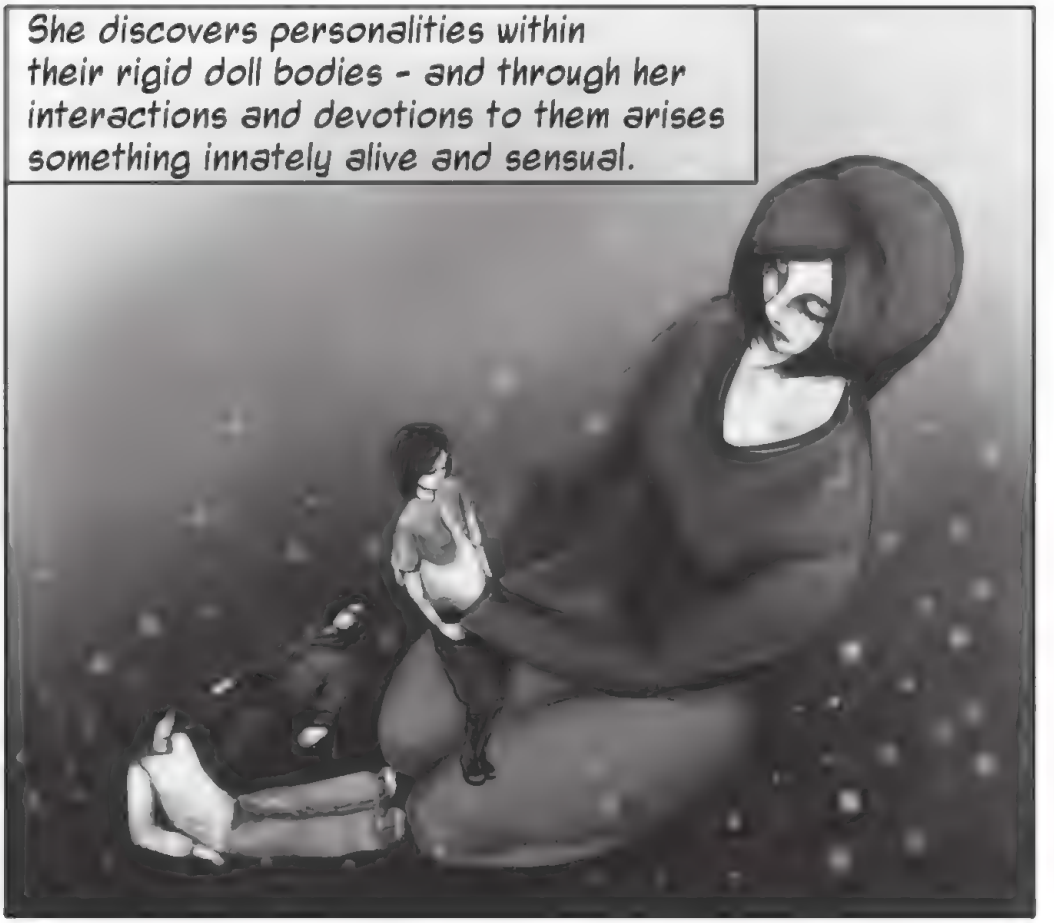

These dolls have given her an opening into that world of possibility and potential...


In moving their bodies - posing them as they interact, a world grows around her- engulfing them all in her narrative of fantasy.


The dolls have become children for her. She names them, buys things for them, and changes their clothes as they change the stories...


She can care for and communicate with them in a way that is not possible in the larger world.


There is just something special about them - as every young girl can tell you - something Aeryn cannot find anywhere else.


She discovers personalities within their rigid doll bodies - and through her interactions and devotions to them arises something innately alive and sensual.


It is so hard for her to look at them and just see a doll...


For example, one day she will look at her doll, Hayden, and decide he likes yogurt.


She can look at them and see stories magically emerge...
...around their personalities- blossoming into complex narratives formed from her penchant for shojo characters in anime.
Collecting ball-jointed dolls brings Aeryn into a collaborative world of her artistic efforts...


... her keen interest in anime and manga which provides her with a numinous landscape bounded only by the limitations of her own desires.

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## The Space between Worlds: *Mushishi* and Japanese Folklore

PAUL JACKSON

Nagahama Hiroshi (director). 2005. *Mushishi.* Fort Worth, Tex.: Funimation Entertainment. Volumes 1–6: ASIN B000NQR8K6, ASIN B000OONQ76, ASIN B000UR9TAU, ASIN B000XJD3EI, ASIN B000XXWKG6, ASIN B0010X8NLY.

Adapted from Urushibara Yuki's manga, *Mushishi* presents a world of wondrous strangeness and allure. Here, life in its purest form courses beneath the Earth's surface, seeping into the soil and hanging in the air. Spirits of the dead rub shoulders with the living as mysterious creatures hibernate in mountain hollows and dwell beneath the surfaces of stagnant swamps. Like most stories of the fantastic, however, this world isn't as distant as it first appears. Reimagining the forms and themes of traditional folktales, *Mushishi* weaves Shinto mythology and rich evocative artistry into a tapestry as quintessentially Japanese as the medium it inhabits. Exploring these influences doesn't diminish *Mushishi*'s charm but brings it tantalizingly closer, begging us to get lost within.

Guiding us through this landscape is Ginko, a traveling Mushishi specializing in the strange life forms known as *mushi*, literally meaning "bug" or "insect" but here referring to much more elusive creatures: "They are kept at a distance, coarse and mysterious, they seem to be completely different from the flora and fauna that are familiar to us." Set in an unspecified period of Japan's past, each stand-alone episode explores the effects these *mushi* have on humans. In episode 1, for example, Ginko travels deep into a thriving mountain forest. Inside, Shinra, a young boy, lives in isolation; unbeknownst to him, the spirit of his deceased grandmother maintains a protective vigil. Ginko discovers that when Shinra's grandmother was a young girl she took part in a *mushi* banquet, a gathering of *mushi* in human form who invite their guests to drink from a sake cup. Upon doing so the recipient ceases to be human and becomes an inhabitant of the other world, a plane of existence beyond our own.

Episode 1 also introduces the central tenets of Shinto, Japan's native religion. In her landmark study of shamanistic practices in Japan, Carmen Blacker explains that "our human world is no more than a narrow segment of the cosmos . . . beyond it lies a further realm, altogether 'other,' peopled by beings non-human, endowed with powers non-human, whose whole order of existence is ambivalent, mysterious, and strange."[1] In *Mushishi,* this other realm is visualized as an expansive, ever-moving river of green light—animated using digital-processing techniques—known as the *Kouki,* or "light wine." Flowing beneath the earth's surface, the *Kouki* nourishes the land and inspires fear and fascination in the human world above. Each episode of the series features a different *mushi* born from this river.

Significantly, unlike its Western counterparts, the other realm of Shinto myth isn't entirely separate from our own. The boundaries are blurred and its intersections varied and veiled; the exact location of the other world and its entrance portals is subject to great debate. Many traditional folktales point below the ocean to the watery kingdom of Ryūgū, whose serpentine guardians block passage to halls of unparalleled wealth and beauty. Other myths and legends identify Japan's many mountains

as the home of *kami* and a point of intersection with the other world. Given that the *Kouki* is ever moving, *Mushishi* can conceivably explore both. Tellingly, the vast majority of episodes take place on Japan's shores or deep within inland mountains. Indicative of the importance of these locales, director Nagahama Hiroshi requested that Waki Takeshi, *Mushishi*'s art director, produce background images for each episode before production began. The results dramatically amplify the series' stories, linking them to traditional folklore and contributing to the palpable atmosphere of earthly wonder that runs throughout the full twenty-six episodes.

In Shinto myth, the mysterious beings Blacker refers to are known as *kami*. Like *mushi*, they can be hard to define. Some people, quite specifically, believe *kami* to be beings from the other realm, while others, more generally, use the term to refer to anything beyond the ordinary. Both schools of thought agree that *kami* can have a profound impact on human life; they can be the cause (and solution) of natural disasters, human illness, and unhappiness. As Blacker observes, "Their nature is non-moral, ambivalent, perilous, [and] unpredictable."[2] Although each species behaves differently, collectively *mushi* share many characteristics with traditional *kami*. Episode 2 features Sui, a young girl forced to live blindfolded in the enveloping darkness of an outdoor storage shed. It transpires that, prior to her current isolation, Sui suffered unbearable pain when her eyes were exposed to sunlight. It is later revealed that *mushi* are living behind Sui's eyelids, causing her aversion to sunlight and eventually blinding her. In another episode, *mushi* are responsible for deafening the population of a snow-covered village. Like *kami*, the *mushi* cannot be treated with traditional medicine and are often held responsible for symptoms beyond the everyday.

*Mushishi* certainly isn't the only anime series to feature *kami*. Miyazaki Hayao's masterpiece *Princess Mononoke* (1997, *Mononokehime*) is a notable example. Set in the Muromachi era (1392–1573 CE), a time of great upheaval in Japanese history, *Princess Mononoke* centers on the population of an active iron mill and the forest gods fighting to save their natural habitat. Like *Mushishi*, Miyazaki's film predominantly takes place in a lush mountain forest. In addition to the forest gods themselves, hundreds of *kodama*, or tree spirits, perch weightlessly on outstretched branches and gather amid the dense forest foliage. Featured throughout classic folklore, Miyazaki reportedly based his interpretation of the traditional *kodama* on the way brilliant sunlight reflects through raindrops. The result is a curious white creature with a small body and bulbous head. Like the raindrops that inspired them, Miyazaki's *kodama* exude an enchanting luminescence—a guiding light beckoning lost travelers and calling curious children—that is shared by the myriad *mushi* and indeed by the flowing *Kouki*.

Like Miyazaki's film, *Mushishi* delves into Japan's folkloric past and adapts it to incorporate new concepts and ideas. Episode 22, for example, offers a haunting reworking of the Ryūgū legend of bowl-lending pools. Many variations of these tales exist, but traditionally villagers are said to travel to Ryūgū's entranceways seeking to borrow bowls. Standing on the pond's bank, the travelers make their request and return the following day to find bowls of the finest craftsmanship washed ashore. *Mushishi* takes this basic idea but tells a very different story. Ginko arrives at a small island village. Off the coast, strange lights shimmer below the water's surface. He eventually learns that the lights mark the entrance to Ryūgū. For decades the villagers have sailed to the lights and offered the bodies of the recently deceased to the kingdom below. The following night thousands of glowing red spheres, no larger than small berries, float to the surface. Women who consume these spheres fall pregnant and, in due course, give birth to children identical to the deceased.

The glowing lights, Ginko discovers, are in fact *mushi* that feed off the life of the dead and reduce them to their base embryos, explaining the mysterious rebirths.

Episode 14, *Inside The Cage,* similarly incorporates the folktale "The Bamboo-Cutter's Daughter."[3] The well-known story tells of a bamboo cutter who discovers a light emanating from a bamboo stalk. Curious, he gently opens the stalk and peers inside and, much to his surprise, finds a delightful baby girl nestled deep within. The bamboo-cutter adopts the girl and watches her grow into a woman so beautiful that a soft light is said to surround her. Like the bamboo cutter, Ginko finds himself in a vast bamboo forest that spreads across the base of a mountain. Inside he meets Kisuke, who also encountered a girl of radiant beauty born from bamboo. Years have passed since their first encounter and Kisuke and Setsu, the bamboo girl, are now married with a child. Kisuke longs for the village life he once had, but he and his wife seem irrevocably bound to a shining white bamboo stalk. Ginko eventually identifies the white stalk as a *mushi* that feeds off bamboo roots. Those who drink its sap are unable to wander beyond its bough. Realizing this, Setsu fells the *mushi,* allowing Kisuke to return to his hometown. Having rejected the bamboo that birthed and nourished her, Setsu eventually dies as a consequence.

Tales of marriage and childbirth between humans and *kami* proliferate in Japanese folklore; even when *Mushishi* doesn't draw direct parallels, many episodes offer variations on this theme. Episode 21 offers a particularly striking example. Aki and Yasuke contact Ginko because their firstborn has fallen ill under mysterious circumstances. Upon Ginko's arrival, Aki tells how she and Yasuke wed deep in the mountain forest. Already pregnant, Aki discovered a peculiar green mark on her wedding veil. Its consequences were not fully understood until the birth of their first child. Born neither human nor beast, the "child" emerged as a gelatinous green substance that rapidly fled beneath the house. Six months later Yasuke awakens to a faint scratching sound: underneath the house, he discovers a six-month-old boy. Seeing a solution to her loss, Aki adopts the child and raises it as her own. By the time of Ginko's arrival, Aki and Yasuke have adopted five children under the same circumstances. Ginko immediately identifies the children as *mushi.* He explains that the green stain on Aki's veil occurred as the *mushi* attached itself to her unborn child, killing it in the process. The "children" she now cares for are simply vessels providing food and nourishment for the *mushi*'s main body residing in the soil beneath their house.

When considering a series as thematically rich as *Mushishi,* it is easy to overlook its visual aesthetic. With the exception of the digitally enhanced *mushi,* the series is very much understated, which proves to be an asset to the stories. Flashbacks often feature minimal movement with no backgrounds. Character nuances, minute shifts in expression, and subtle changes in a scene's lighting all quietly conspire to lure the viewer into the series' mesmerizing world. *Mushishi* offers a window onto a time and place at once painfully human and ethereally other. Its aesthetics offer a vantage of brilliant clarity. Nagahama has said he would like *Mushishi* to evoke the sensation of "lights that are not visible and sounds that are not audible."[4] This intangibility in many respects defines the series—the pause between breaths, the distance between lives, and the space between worlds.

**Notes**

1. Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan,* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge Curzon, 1999), 1.

2. Ibid.

3. Teresa Peirce Williston, *Japanese Fairy Tales: Second Series.* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1911), 2.

4. Quoted from the liner noted to the first DVD in the series.

# Animation beyond the Boundaries

SUSAN NAPIER

Alan Cholodenko, editor. *The Illusion of Life 2: More Essays on Animation.* Sydney, Australia: Power Publications, 2007. ISBN 0-909952-34-5.

For animation fans with an intellectual bent, Alan Cholodenko's *The Illusion of Life II* provides a dense and stimulating feast of ideas on animation in many forms and contexts. The volume under review here is a follow-up to Cholodenko's 1991 volume,[1] one of the first books to take a scholarly theoretical approach to animation.

Like the earlier work, *The Illusion of Life 2* includes a wide variety of animation scholars and a dizzying range of topics, in this case everything from Porky Pig's stutter to Pamela Anderson's body in relation to Disney's *Little Mermaid*. For readers of *Mechademia*, The present volume provides not only an entire section on Japan but also a thoughtful introductory essay by the editor that includes a discussion of anime in relation to animation in general.

Since readers of this review are likely to be particularly interested in anime, I will focus first on the "Japan" section of the book. As is typical with *The Illusion of Life* overall, the topics are varied but include a useful essay by the Japanese critic Ono Kosei giving a relatively short but quite comprehensive "history of comics and animation in Japan." Inevitably, this includes Tezuka Osamu and Miyazaki Hayao but also mentions the less mainstream *Evangelion* and even Kon Satoshi's *Perfect Blue*. I particularly appreciated the fact that Ono began with a section on prewar cartoons, a still-understudied aspect of anime and manga.

None of the four other anime commentators are either Japanese or Japan scholars, which sometimes leads to jarring generalities about "Japan" but no serious factual errors. On the positive side, precisely because the commentators by and large are looking at anime theoretically rather than in specifically cultural terms, the essays are often especially thought provoking, forcing a Japan scholar such as myself to look at anime in a wholly new light. For example, Philip Brophy, a film commentator who specializes in sound and horror, brilliantly explores the extraordinary dynamism of anime, summing it up in the term "linear energy," a concept he applies to several case studies from well-known anime films such as *Akira* and *My Neighbor Totoro*.

Even more provocative is Jane Goodall's essay on the infamous pornographic/apocalyptic film *Urotsukidōji* (1989, *Legend of the Overfiend*). Reading the film in terms of apocalyptic boundary violations, she brings in Derrida and Deleuze to develop a discourse of transgression and hybridity that genuinely illuminates this very problematic text. I do wonder if her statement that "the anime tradition is inherently pornographic" may be going a bit far, but she seems to mean that anime is built around violations of the body (but isn't that true of animation in general?).[2] Pauline Moore also invokes Derrida but seems particularly to be following Freud in her linking of "cuteness" in anime with the return of the repressed in the form of the lingering shadow of the atomic bomb and the American Occupation. It is a pity that this essay was written before the artist Murakami Takashi's exploration of this same subject in his important "Little Boy" show at the Japan Society in New York a couple of years ago.[3] More surprising, however, is her failure to refer to Sharon Kinsella's groundbreaking work on cuteness in contemporary Japan.[4]

William Routt's essay "De Anime" also makes broad generalizations about anime, but in his case they arise from his thoughtful examination of what the term "animation" really means. Using this question as a springboard, Routt provides an intriguing discussion of humanity and machines in the popular manga and anime *Battle Angel Alita*. The final anime essay by Fred Patten, a well-known writer on anime, brings us back to the animal realm, specifically that of Tezuka Osamu's *Kimba* versus

Disney's *The Lion King*. Addressing the pervasive suspicion that Disney "borrowed" a great deal from Tezuka, Patten provides an impressive amount of evidence (including in an appendix a chronology and a list of relevant publications) to prove that these suspicions are well founded.

The rest of *The Illusion of Life 2* is also well worth reading for those interested in the animated medium in general. Sometimes these essays invoke Japanese cartoons, but they are most interesting simply for the way they expand our thinking about animation and its properties, uses, and abuses, sometimes in relation to live action and sometimes with regard to other kinds of animated instruments such as computers or flight simulators. One of the most intriguing of these essays is David Ellison's discussion of computer games in terms of war, racism, and contemporary cityscapes. Although Ellison is particularly concerned with the first Gulf War, the so-called "Nintendo War," and also the *Street Fighter* video game, many of his observations are even more pertinent to the more recent Iraq conflict and to the megapopular *Grand Theft Auto* game. As he puts it in a typically provocative statement, "Here an American war is being hijacked by the stylistics of a Japanese video game company,"[5] referring to the increasing "de-realization" of the contemporary world that is the subtheme of many of the other essays as well.

Indeed the question of what is "real" and what is "illusion," and the increasingly porous boundaries between them, occupies many of the essays. Frieda Riggs, for example, provides a spirited defense for Ralph Bakshi's use of rotoscoping in his animated *Lord of the Rings*, a technique that was criticized at the time as "not animation." Richard Thompson discusses the deep structures of deferrals operating in the Daffy Duck classic *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery*. Rex Butler, in comparing Steven Spielberg with *The Lion King*, makes the case that Spielberg and Disney go beyond postmodernism to show "the illusion of the illusion, expos[ing] this world as itself an illusion."[6]

As should be clear by now, *The Illusion of Life 2* is far from being a straightforward celebration of the pleasures of animation. Those looking for enjoyable anecdotes about cartoons and their industry should go elsewhere, and even the theoretically sophisticated should be warned that there are occasional passages in the book that sound almost like parodies of pretentious academic jargon. But for those seeking to appreciate animation on a deeper and more complex level, I highly recommend this book.

**Notes**

1. Alan Cholodenko, ed., *The Illusion of Life: Essays in Animation* (Sydney, Australia: Power Publications, 1991).

2. Ibid., 164.

3. Murakami Takashi, curator, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, exhibition at Japan Society Gallery, New York, April 9 to July 24, 2005. The exhibition catalog is published as Murakami Takashi, editor, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005, and New York: Japan Society, 2005). [Editors' note: see also William Benzon's review "Godzilla's Children: Murakami Takes Manhattan" in *Mechademia* 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 283–87.]

4. Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, 220–54 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995).

5. Cholodenko, *The Illusion of Life* 1, 351.

6. Ibid., 330.

## Three Faces of Eva

Anno Hideaki (supervising director). 2008. *Evangelion: 1.01 You Are (Not) Alone*. Tokyo: King Records/Starchild. ASIN B0012V4WSW.

**Editors' Note**

Two thousand eight saw the release of *Evangelion: 1.01*, Hideaki Anno's opening story arc in

his remake of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. The original series, first released in 1995, has become a major force in anime for directors, who needed to deal with the implicit challenges posed by *Eva*, and for fans, for whom it provided an endlessly fascinating opportunity for exegesis and interpretation. Events like the new *Eva* are not common, and so, wanting to provide different opinions about Anno's new work, we asked three reviewers to comment. Was it worth it to remake a classic, and what, if anything, is genuinely new about *Eva 1.01*? Here are their reviews.

## Cruel Angels? Cruel Fathers!

PAUL M. MALONE

Forty-nine minutes into *You Are (Not) Alone*—exactly at the film's midpoint—Fuyutsuki Kōzō, aide to NERV commander Ikari Gendō, remarks that Ikari's son Shinji, troubled pilot of the enormous cyborg weapon known as the Evangelion or EVA, will eventually come to behave as expected. Ikari replies that it is now time to bring Shinji closer to his fellow pilot Ayanami Rei in accordance with a long-standing plan. Fuyutsuki then muses that they are working from a fourteen-year-old scenario and observes that they and their mission depend on children: "It's beyond cruel" ("*Kakoku sugiru na*"). Ikari remains impassive.

No such scene takes place in the 1995 television series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shinseiki Evangerion*), which provides the basis of the new film. In addition to its functions as social critique and philosophical exercise (and its pretentiousness in both respects), the original *Evangelion* was always also a parodic reversal of mecha stories wherein saintly inventor-fathers create giant robots to be piloted against evil by dutiful sons—the iconic pattern of Yokoyama Mitsuteru's *Tetsujin 28-go* (1956–66, *Gigantor*) and *Giant Robo* (1967–68).[1] Ikari Shinji is *Evangelion*'s Jungian archetypal hero, raised in isolation after the early loss of his mother and recalled to the center of events in a moment of crisis, where his powers (here, to control his EVA even without training) become evident. Unlike many of his precursors, however, Shinji is already traumatized and embittered by loss; he has little taste for heroics or desire to accommodate his father. As for Ikari Gendō, his far-from-saintly behavior continually poses the question of whether a father obsessed with engineering and deploying macabre and powerful weapons—even if for the greater good—is deserving of filial piety.

Not much of this seems to have changed since 1995. Although the animation has been beautifully upgraded, expanded to widescreen, and augmented by well-integrated CGI (and the *Shinseiki* has been dropped, with the "new century" now almost a decade old), much of *Evangelion: 1.01* appears deceptively familiar despite the early appearance of several well-known elements and hints at greater novelty in the three sequels to come. This may still be *Evangelion*, but here the critique moves beyond parody, and, for a Western viewer at least, this is *Evangelion* post-9/11, where the "war on (absolute) terror" waged against the monstrous Angels is in itself more absolutely terrifying and merciless than ever, and Shinji's training threatens at one point to turn him into a mechanized zombie without preparing him for actual combat.

I do not mean to imply, however, that *Evangelion* has been "rebuilt" with this specific political commentary in mind; rather, given the series' setting of institutionalized paranoia, with its attacks without warning, ongoing alerts, dissembling to the public, and supposedly cooperative national and international agencies competing and following their own, often extremely personal, agendas, it seems that history has caught up with *Evangelion*. Much of what constituted the show's science fiction atmosphere in 1995 has become, particularly in the first few years after 2001, the new normal.

And *Evangelion* has become more "normal," and less avant-garde, in its turn: the original series' convoluted narrative structures and

multilayered visuals have been simplified, while the fragmentary exposition has been fleshed out; both of these alterations are greatly facilitated by not having to parcel out the story in twenty-two-minute increments. Thus, while the film retells the series' first six episodes, the initial five are efficiently disposed of as mere run-up to the sixth, which ultimately takes up almost a third of the total ninety-eight minutes running time. The result is that *You Are (Not) Alone* steams along less like a cerebral experience and more like an action movie—and given that it was always debatable whether *Evangelion* was filled with more portent than actual meaning, this is as much an improvement as the cosmetic technical upgrades.

To point out these changes, in retooling the series' sixth episode to take up a good third of the film, Anno and company not only provide a strong dramatic climax but also showcase significant modifications to the characterization of Shinji's immediate superior Katsuragi Misato, which now contrasts more strongly with that of Ikari Gendō. Throughout the film, recurring scenes of Misato and her colleague Akagi Ritsuko chatting at work both provide much of the film's exposition and establish the two women as professionals with a humdrum routine between Angel attacks—in the aftermath, they are part CSI, part cleanup crew. This device counters the original, much lighter portrayal of Misato and sets her up as a more credible commander; she now authoritatively plans the attack on the film's third Angel in a long, moody sequence of dimly lit meetings and nighttime exterior shots, rather than in the breezy pace and pastel color scheme of the series. Moreover, she now motivates the ever-reluctant Shinji by grabbing his hand, dragging him down to the lowest level of NERV headquarters, and showing him the crucified Lilith, assuring him that not only is he fighting on everybody's behalf but that everybody is also fighting beside him.

Finally, during the climactic sniping attack on the Angel, Shinji is momentarily disabled by its counterattack, and Ikari senior coldly suggests that Rei take his place (another event not in the original). Where Fuyutsuki may criticize Ikari but never stops him, Misato now openly confronts her superior to defend Shinji: "Please believe in your own son. I too believe in Unit 01's pilot" ("*Jibun no kodomo wo, shinjite kudasai. Watashi mo, shugōki pilotto wo shinjimasu*"—a nice pun on Shinji's name). Ikari finally replies, "I leave it up to you. Do as you please" ("*Makaseru. Suki ni shitamae*"). And with Misato's encouragement, Shinji crawls back to position, takes aim, and scores a direct hit, saving the world and Rei (to the sound of a mass choir, no less). In the penultimate shot, Rei takes Shinji's hand—another innovation—and so it seems that Gendō has achieved his aim after all. But a pan up to the moon reveals a surprise: Gendō's SEELE adversaries are making their next move as well, setting up the next film.

As the film's subtitle indicates, Shinji may now have more support than ever in the familial struggle that is the story's true backbone; the two crucial handclasps in the last half-hour—when Misato grasps Shinji's hand in Lilith's chamber and he finally squeezes back as he promises to fight, and then when Shinji reaches out for Rei's hand in turn and she takes it—promise a potential for human contact that may yet help Shinji out of his hedgehog's dilemma. These signs indicate that Anno, too, is even more clearly on Shinji's side than before. Although he may be working from a fourteen-year-old scenario as well, he clearly hopes that his now middle-aged target audience will still identify with his protagonist and remain equally unreconciled to the generational conflict at hand. Those ominous parentheses in the subtitle, however, may well be warning us not to expect a happy ending. The original series ultimately implied that terror was not an external force but an integral part of the human soul, and one of the many essential qualities that we share with the Angels: we have met the enemy, and he is us, in more ways than one. In a new

century where the fathers' generation is clearly even more ready to manipulate and sacrifice its young, it seems very unlikely that the new *Evangelion* has changed its mind on this point; it may well be that Shinji is only being set up to fall that much further and suffer that much more. To be continued . . .

## Epic Fail: Still Dreary, after All These Years

MADELINE ASHBY

Since its appearance in 1995, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shinseiki Evangerion)* has so thoroughly permeated anime visual and narrative culture that even series with no science fiction or giant mecha plot now reference its signature images. It follows a tried-and-true format: a young boy must pilot a giant robot to defeat unearthly invaders while simultaneously defining himself. In this case, the boy is Ikari Shinji, a self-loathing teenager, the robot is the Evangelion, a skyscraper-high biomechanoid capable of generating force fields, and the invaders are the Angels, "other possibilities" of humanity who threaten to bring about the apocalypse. But to me, the heart of the show has little to do with religious iconography or a science fiction plot and more to do with its unflinching portrayal of human failure.

In 2008, the series was approximately as old as an Evangelion pilot. In addition, director Hideaki Anno and his new venture, Studio Khara, produced *Evangelion: 1.01 You Are (Not) Alone*. The film is the first in a promised series of four, and it covers the first six episodes in the television series. It features all-new computer animation but reproduces shot-for-shot many of the television series' key sequences. At this juncture, it seems appropriate to ask how *Neon Genesis Evangelion* has held up over the intervening fourteen years and whether this "rebuild" sits upon the same foundations and framework that made the original series both popular among fans and provocative for critics.

*Evangelion* follows Shinji's (often misguided) attempts to answer foundational questions about existence. Rather than an epic battle between good and evil, the series ends with Shinji deciding whether humanity is worthy of life at all. The acts of pettiness, bravery, and self-sacrifice on the part of the other characters influence his ultimate choice. In between savage mecha battles and winking fan service, the series takes the viewer on a tour of human weakness on a variety of levels: systemic, interpersonal, and spiritual.

The television series introduces systemic or governmental failure early in the plot. After Shinji's surprise success at defeating his first Angel, we learn that a classmate's sister was injured in the citywide melee. Unlike a number of mecha stories, *Evangelion* dwells on the expense and effort required to repair the damage to the cityscape that Shinji and his fellow pilots cause. The viewer learns that what is spent on a single Evangelion is enough to bankrupt a small country, and the constant repairs to Tokyo-3 mean that the sounds of construction punctuate the series' soundscape. (Both a persistent drilling sound and the yearlong buzz of cicadas indicate that the city has changed permanently. There are no longer seasons, and the city—like its residents—can never be whole.) These frustrated attempts to rebuild that which is repeatedly shattered are emblematic of both the city's doomed fate and Shinji's personal relationships, particularly that between himself and his father Ikari Gendō.

Gendō, the series' foremost villain, is an accomplished schemer who cares little for his son's well-being and who piggybacked on his wife's brilliance to achieve his career goals. Throughout the story, many of the characters have the opportunity to stop his slow wriggle up the chain of command, but they refuse. When Shinji initially fails to defy his father, he is only the last in a long line of men and women who either failed to recognize Gendō's menace or to speak up about it. Most of the series' adult characters,

the trusted authority figures who are supposed to protect Shinji and the other pilots, are completely aware of Gendō's villainy but do little to stop his progress or to warn Shinji or the others about his true motives—thereby saving their skins by keeping the kids in the cockpit where they can continue fighting Angels.

Selfishness, pride, vulnerability, and frailty play out in the subtext of the series, which regularly bubbles up in long, meditative sequences wherein Shinji and the others analyze their motives for piloting the Evangelion or participating in Gendō's plans. But it's in those subtextual moments that the series gains distinction: like the other anime masterpieces of the late 1990s (*Cowboy Bebop*, for example), it says most when it shows least. The sight of a broken pair of glasses or a woman slumped over a desk tells us all we need to know about the emotional gravity of a specific moment. Similarly, the characters frequently speak in subtext, bluffing to avoid the perils of intimacy. As Shinji's guardian Misato says: "I had to get falling-down drunk just to say this much," and we learn that her block afflicts all the characters. Both the television series and the *End of Evangelion* film eventually break the narrative silence through metafictional dialogues on the nature of perspective. They flay each character, exposing the layers of self-deception undergirding the everyday lies that help Gendō's power structure remain in place—but only after every character's unreliability as a narrator has been assured.

This affinity for subtext within the original series may explain why a "rebuild" looked so attractive. With such a veiled, convoluted plot, where the characters almost never speak honestly, there is always more to explain. The series seems fascinated with the idea of rebirth: clones and machines that need endless repair, even regrowth, inhabit a city always faced with simultaneous disaster and reconstruction. The Evangelion franchise has continually rebirthed itself through multiple videogames, three different manga storylines, and two films from GAINAX Studios, each iteration both a revenue stream and an opportunity to clarify a story that resists transparency or completion.

Was a rebuild of *Evangelion* necessary? Perhaps. I recently watched both the television series and the *End of Evangelion* film with Peter Watts, a sci-fi novelist, who had never seen either, and he was mystified about the fact that the series had risen to such prominence without giving viewers payoff on the many narrative threads laid out. Anno's new version cuts much of the fat away from the original series, but it doesn't seem any less cryptic, and that's troubling for anyone who wanted frank explanations of the *Evangelion* universe. And for viewers who watched the series for its emotional impact or its comment on the human condition, there is very little to exclaim over. Shinji's angst remains the same as it did fourteen years ago, and Anno has done nothing to unpack it or to otherwise sound the darker depths within the plot—Shinji's attraction to Rei, for example, or the root of Unit 01's "berserker" behavior. My hopes for the next in Anno's new series are high, but so are my expectations. A new coat of paint does not a rebuild make.

## The Rebuild of Anime

THOMAS LAMARRE

Why "rebuild" one of the most commercially successful and controversial animated television series in the history of Japanese animation, *Shinseki Evangerion* (1995–96, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*)? After all, the series has already spawned two films that together retold the series and offered an alternative ending (*Death and Rebirth* and *The End of Evangelion*, both in 1997), and the original series has recently been reissued in a special platinum edition. Naturally, we should not rule out the profit motive, particularly because the rebuild of *Evangelion* is the inaugural venture of a new animation company, and *Evangelion 1.01* grossed beyond expectations at the box office in Japan. Nonetheless,

the quick and cynical answer to the question "why rebuild?"—namely, to squeeze more cash out of hardcore fans to fund a new studio—does not tell us anything about the dynamics or specifics of this rebuild.

Much of the hype surrounding the rebuild stressed the high quality of the animation. For instance, in an official statement about the motivations behind it, director and writer Anno Hideaki referred to the exhaustion and stagnation of the Japanese animation industries, emphasizing his team's efforts to use the best techniques possible.[2] These technical efforts pay off. From the first scenes in which digitalization allows the producers to paint the formerly blue seas in deep reddish hues, we sense that something has radically shifted in this *Eva* world. The combat sequences from the original series and films are dramatically reworked and enhanced, and the results are visually stunning, especially the design of the Angels. Shamshel initially appears much as in the original, but then changes in the course of its battle with the Eva piloted by the ostensible hero Ikari Shinji: Shamshel's torso opens into a set of articulating ribs that claw the air like so many crab legs. The digital rebuild of Ramiel is especially impressive: where the original presented us with a mysterious mirror-surfaced and rotating diamond, the new Ramiel goes through a series of transformations, its surface dividing and reforming along fractal-like infinitesimal dimensions, an embodiment of processes of geometric differentiation and integration. At this level, the rebuild is largely about technical or technological revivification of the original animation.

With the emphasis on technical enhancement comes a greater emphasis on combat sequences and action-centered storytelling. In this respect, the rebuild departs from the styles and procedures that were the hallmark of Anno's animations from *Nadia* through *Eva* and *Kare Kano*. Anno gained renown for his hyperlimited animation, which amplified and dramatized the conventions of limited cel animation associated with Japanese television animation—what we commonly think of as anime. The rebuild pares away many features that characterized the original series. Thus the rebuild invites us to ask whether it renews and revives the received conventions, procedures, and stylistics of Japanese television animation production or if it abandons them and invents something quite different. Does the rebuild signal the end of anime or is it a rebuild of anime?

Here Anno's vexed relation to anime merits consideration. Although he is notorious for his comments about the childishness of anime and of anime *otaku* (and he intended the last episode of the original series as a cruel shock to fans, to awaken them from their childish expectations and dependencies), and although he claims to prefer the maturity of film to the juvenilia of animation, his television animations have enjoyed greater commercial and critical success than his feature films. His renown and genuine talents as an animation director, writer, and mecha designer are such that Anno cannot afford to abandon animation for cinema. Nor should he, even if cinema still commands greater artistic prestige in critical circles.

The rebuild of *Evangelion* is in keeping with Anno's ambivalent relation to anime and with his impulse to build on anime and, on the contrary, to get out of it altogether. The same is suggested by the constant rumors about a live-action *Eva* film that would realize the full potential of the series: the impulse is to go beyond anime, to capture something within anime that is not limited to anime. Anno's comments about the exhaustion and stagnation of Japanese animation also make sense in light of his ambivalence about anime.[3]

Part of the appeal of the original series lay in its nonlinear approach to narrative. An episode ends with a cliffhanger, for instance, in which our putative hero Shinji is locked in perilous battle with one of the Angels, but the next episode begins after the battle with Shinji in a hospital bed. He and we don't quite know what

happened—not until the end of the episode in which the battle plays out. Likewise, we follow the trials and tribulations of seemingly minor characters who suddenly turn out to be very important, only to fade away. In addition, at the level of imagery and symbolism, the original series goes in a number of different directions, referring us to bioengineering, daily life in contemporary Tokyo, Kabalistic stories of creation, and a range of other religious traditions. Nothing quite adds up, but everything remains meaningful, and therein lie the charm and the narrative strength of the *Eva* series. It juxtaposed and multiplied different frames of references without any attempt to resolve or synthesize their contradictions within overarching unity. Such nonlinear and nontotalizing procedures follow beautifully from Anno's optimization of procedures associated with limited animation: flattening and dehierarchicizing elements and planes of the image, erratic rhythms of editing, and incessant recombination of image and text across the screen. Anno's transformation of limited animation into hyperlimited animation created a mode of animated expression that tends to disorient us by introducing and playing with multiple orientations in action, symbolism, perception, and character. This is one reason fans kept asking for more—they clamored for more clarification and orientation, which Anno at once promised and withheld.

The rebuild includes reminders of its anime sources, throwing a "splash" panel with the title of the film into the middle of the movie in the manner of a television episode, and ending with "to be continued" and a preview of the next film as if it were a new "episode." What is more, true to Sadamoto Yoshiyuki's designs, the characters retain some of their original ambiguity and sense of disorientation. On the whole, however, the rebuild is more linear; it strives to orient viewers less ambiguously. This is surely why some fans complained that the rebuild doesn't add anything to the original series; on the contrary, they argued, the rebuild is a straightforward and rather flat retelling of one major plotline with enhanced designs and battle sequences. In sum, at the level of story, the rebuild is lean, clean, and direct by comparison to the original series, albeit with some interesting shifts in emphasis: the rebuild makes the relationship between Ayanami Rei and Ikari Shinji more central to the story, adding footage and enhancing their sequences.

As a consequence, any sense of surprise and disorientation with the rebuild comes largely through reference to the original series. For instance, in an odd temporal twist, the fifth Child, Nagisa Kaoru, who appears near the end of the original series, suddenly makes an appearance at the end of *Eva 1.01*. At such moments, we find something out of joint, something disorienting, something that appears to arrive from a totally different frame of reference—as if from another world. Nonetheless, in light of the greater linearity of the rebuild in comparison to the anime series, questions persist about the relation between the two. Does Anno's bid to revive the supposedly exhausted world of Japanese animation amount to an abandonment of anime?

In his statement about the rebuild, Anno expresses concerns about *Evangelion* being too old to bother with. "Yet," he concludes, "in the past twelve years, there has been nothing newer than *Eva*."[4]

As my account thus far indicates, the novelty of the original *Eva* for me lay in how it incessantly multiplied frames of reference, deftly disorienting and redirecting viewer expectations. At the same time, characters, character designs, and moods began to take precedence over narrative linearity. Azuma Hiroki makes a similar observation in his many discussions of *Eva*, stressing that the series marked a turning point in the animation industry from a narrative-centered pattern of serialization (as with *Gundam*, for example) to a character-centered pattern of serialization that anticipates game franchises structured around the production of personalized characters through an assembly

of *moe* elements of attraction (cat ears, glasses, uniforms, hats, etc.).[5] To be sure, in contrast to the series, the rebuild places greater emphasis on linear narrative. Yet, unlike *Gundam* or the "Leiji-verse" (the universe of Matsumoto Leiji), the rebuild does not *expand* the narrative world of *Eva*. Nor does it do what many other movie versions of animated series do: try to pack all the complexity of a series into one dazzling yet almost incoherent film, or make a new story that is so different from the series that it begs to be read as a commentary or gloss on the original. Instead, the rebuild eliminates many image-story layers from the original anime to produce a more single-minded world. In this respect, the rebuild is indeed at odds not only with the original series specifically but also with anime generally.

So what does Anno think was novel about the original *Eva*, if not its use of multiple image-story layers?

Anno suggests that the importance or newness of *Eva* lay (and still lies) in its revelation of will (*kokorozashi wo shimesu*), not matters of technology (*gijutsuron*).[6] His comments carry two implications. First, consonant with his ambivalence about anime, he implies that the *Eva* series was and still is genuinely different from other anime. Where other animations are obsessed with or primarily driven by technological concerns, *Eva* concerns itself with matters of the heart and will. Second, Anno implies that the rebuild of *Eva* is a matter of rebuilding its revelation of will, rather than reprising its techniques and technical concerns. From this angle, the rebuild of *Eva* appears as Anno's "triumph of the will." It expresses a will to overcome or transcend anime.

Oddly, however, even as Anno disparages anime, he invariably evokes it as a point of reference and even as a point of departure. He paradoxically claims to rebuild an anime that was never anime and never old. In this respect, Anno's relation to anime is not simply destructive but deconstructive. Considering the implications of the unusual term "rebuild" can help to clarify this deconstructive moment in Anno.

To rebuild not only implies taking something apart, it also implies putting something back together again, building it again—as with rebuilding a motor or rebuilding a house. Rebuilding may entail improving, enhancing, or expanding the initial structure and its functions. Yet there are other logics of reconstruction, as with the Ise Shrine, rebuilt every twenty years. In such an instance, rebuilding is not a matter of improvements, expansions, or enhancements. This sort of rebuilding involves a ritual enactment of values that exist not in the prior structures but in the process of rebuilding itself. Ritual rebuilding thus addresses something that was never old. Yet, as ritual, it also walks a fine line between practice-oriented processes and totalizing commitment to the reproduction of eternal values.[7]

Anno's rebuild remains poised between these technical and ritual logics of rebuilding. On the one hand, the rebuild of *Eva* truly enhances and heightens prior imagery and action. It openly presents and highlights its technological advances. On the other hand, it destroys the original anime in an effort to capture its essence or truth. Anno's comments about the newness of *Eva* imply that the rebuild may be construed as a ritual enactment or reenactment of something "never old" about the anime. Such a combination of technological enhancement and eternal values runs the risk of turning *Eva* into what Walter Benjamin called "an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values."[8] If we are to counter such a tendency, we have to insist on the practice-oriented processes associated with ritual rebuilding rather than on the eternal values. This is where the practices of fans and other commentators, that is, practices of reading and criticizing animation, are crucial. It is likely to be *Eva* fans who are in a position to call into question the production of ritual values around this event. They are the ones who can open a deconstructive angle and consider its politics.

To deconstruct is not to take apart or destroy something. It is an attempt to discover how something hangs together, to look at the forces that hold something together. Yet one doesn't deconstruct things, one deconstructs metaphysical assumptions and hierarchies, such as those implicit in elevating "will" over "technology." This hierarchy is precisely what the original series brought into question, at a number of levels. At the level of the moving image, for instance, the original series optimized very low-tech procedures of animation, which challenged the primacy of high tech even as it made low tech look high tech. At the level of story, the alien invaders—the Angels—appeared radically Other and yet proved to be consequences of a human drive for technological optimization. At the level of discourses on selfhood, the series offered the cryptic formulation: "you are (not) alone," which potentially opened a deconstructive angle on identity, self and solitude.

The use of a negation in parentheses, with its vaguely poststructuralist aura, can take on a number of different connotations, but the basic idea here seems to be that togetherness or even community is not a precondition for solitude. Aloneness is not the opposite or negation of togetherness. Even in your aloneness, you are not truly alone; on the contrary you are already with others, with the world. Such a conceit undermines the attribution of *kokorozashi,* or will, to the individual or individuals. It brings a deconstructive gesture into play, asking the question about how we think about togetherness and aloneness. All of which suggests that the greater emphasis on goal-oriented action and linear narrative in *Evangelion: 1.01 You Are (Not) Alone* is not intended to define the entire *Eva* rebuild. Nevertheless, if the rebuild is to live up to this conceit, if it is to renew some measure of the critical and social force that unfolded around the original series, it will surely have to abandon what appears in *Eva 1.01* as abandonment of anime. It will have to live up to the challenge posed by making a rebuild that is (not) anime.

**Notes**

1. Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), 250–51.

2. Anno Hideaki, "Wareware ha futatabi, nani o tsukurō to shite iru no ka," http://eva.yahoo.co.jp/gekijou/big_message.html (Japanese 2006); http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2007-02-20/hideaki-anno-releases-statement-about-new-evangelion-movies (English, accessed October 15, 2008).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Azuma Hiroki, *Dōbutsu ka suru posutomodan: otaku kara mita Nihon shakai,* Kōdansha gendai shinsho 1575 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 59–62; translated by Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono as *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

6. Anno, "Wareware ha futatabi."

7. Kenneth Dean and Thomas LaMarre, "Ritual Matters," in *Impacts of Modernities,* Traces 3, ed. Thomas LaMarre and Kang Nae-hui (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), and Kenneth Dean and Thomas LaMarre, "Microsociology and The Ritual Event," in *Deleuzian Encounters: Studies in Contemporary Social Issues,* ed. Anna Hickey-Moody and Peta Malins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

8. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 241.

## Brief Visions of a Vast Landscape

TIMOTHY PERPER AND MARTHA CORNOG

Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, and Takayuki Tatsumi, editors. *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-8166-4974-7.

Jaqueline Berndt and Steffi Richter, editors. *Reading Manga: Local and Global Perceptions of Japanese Comics*. Leipzig: Lepiziger Universitätsverlag, 2006. GmbH. ISBN 3-86583-123-0.

Collections of essays are difficult to review. Each essay opens windows into fascinating topics, and one wants to devote many words to each, but one cannot. So reviewers may fall back on hand-waving generalities—"Excellent essays, all of them," "Thoughtful analyses of topics of major interest to all serious thinkers and readers," "Insightful and interesting"—all true in this case but lacking in specificity, perhaps?

Let us focus briefly on another sense in which the essays in these two collections are important and interesting. Current writing on manga and anime is dominated by what appears on the Web—viewer opinions, reviews, blogs, and commentaries. These are often by fans and other enthusiastic, sometimes highly critical readers, usually targeted at like-minded fans. Such commentaries offer personal assessments of quality and give buying advice. They tend not to be analytical essays delving into the origins and nature of manga and anime, not even for the work under review. Such commentaries may offer valuable insights into fan culture, its interests, quirks, and styles of thought and writing. But—this is the nature of the Web, perhaps—they are also ephemeral. After three years no one cares what someone calling himself "Kwodbog6" thought of volume 2 of *Death Note*—it's yesterday's news. So serious readers, scholars, and people who use reviews professionally (like librarians, who use reviews to assist in making purchasing decisions) do not have a wide range of solid commentary to depend on. Enter collections like the two here.

Both may be seen as "topic-centered." For example, in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, Miri Nakamura has contributed a fascinating discussion of robot themes in manga and anime that places these familiar figures not into comparisons of one mecha show versus another but into a Japanese aesthetic history involving robots and semisentient machines who become uncanny surrogates for people, *kami*, and other entities. Robots and other forms of mechanized humanity are also discussed by Susan Napier in relation to *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments Lain* and by Christopher Bolton for *Patlabor 2*. Livia Monnet rounds out the discussion with an essay about artificial life and the uncanny in *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*.

Gender and sexuality also attract attention. Mari Kotani provides historical and biographical details about Japanese women science fiction writers, including stories about women warriors and communities of pregnant women. Kotani also discusses Hagio Moto's 1978 manga *Staa Reddo* and the theme of woman-as-monster: "The metaphor of monsters is certainly a literary tool through which women can defy society and express their frustrations. At the same time, it is perhaps a symbol of their cry for reform and may stand for their grief that they often have no other choice but to turn into monsters" (57). Readers who have seen Fumihiko Takayama's 2001 anime *WXIII*, the third *Patlabor* film, will recognize and resonate with Kotani's insight.

Sharalyn Orbaugh and Saitō Tamaki likewise contribute essays on sexuality to the Bolton et al. collection. Orbaugh tackles the complexities of cyborg sexuality in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and in Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell*. Orbaugh's lenses are the concepts of "subjectivity" and "transformation," in which older keystones of subjectivity—sexuality and singularity—have been shaken by the deep transformations of postmodernism. "As the imagined social body has become increasingly more perfect and controlled—more and more closely fitting the modernist model of (male) autonomous subjectivity—the likelihood of the eruption of the repressed body, in all its abject, excessive, imperfect, uncontrolled, boundary-challenged 'femaleness' increases" (181–82). And

that, for Orbaugh, is a source of some, but only some, optimism for the future.

Saitō Tamaki's take on modern sexuality seems more grim compared to Orbaugh's optimism about the potentials of female sexual freedom. For Saitō, the Japanese male *otaku* escapes from the everyday world into imagined realms of cyborgs, anime, and models of female warriors but is thereby trapped in a Freudian-Lacanian web of estrangement and fictionalization, arising ultimately from symbolic castration repaired only fetishistically by a deep desire to invent and then possess solacing illusions (e.g. models of phallic women, who, in fantasy, replace the now missing phallus). Non-Japanese reviewers may feel insufficiently familiar with the phenomena in question to agree or disagree with Saitō's assessments of Japan, but Saitō's primary lenses—Freud and Lacan—are much more familiar, because they are Western. For readers already immersed in such views, Saitō will serve as a welcome source of ideas; for others, he may be spinning webs of doubtful validity. So we encounter another difficulty in reviewing books of essays: readers must often take sides for or against an author's views. Yet that is what such books are for: to get us thinking—and the Bolton et al. collection succeeds very well.

So does the Berndt-Richter collection: it opens with four essays about Nakazawa Keiji's manga *Barefoot Gen* and its origins in Japan and in translation and then moves to three equally detailed discussions of history-themed manga—Osamu Tezuka's *Adolf,* Maruo Suehiro's several "historically ambiguous" and queasily nationalistic manga, and Koike Kazuo and Kojima Goseki's portrayal of an idealized and doomed samurai warrior, Ogami Ito, in *Lone Wolf and Cub.* These essays will all be valuable to readers interested in the history of manga.

The final five essays in the Berndt-Richter collection are by non-U.S. authors. They offer a very welcome chance to read outside the sometimes much-too-parochial American vision of manga and anime. Jean-Marie Bouissou asks why France has become one of the world's major importers of manga, seen as a "pure pleasure product" manufactured and purchased for the pleasure of reading. Bouissou does not minimize marketing or economics but ultimately sees manga as a "superior product" to American comics and to Franco-Belgian *bandes-dessinées*: manga "draws more powerfully on the great constants of the subconscious, is a better receptacle for personal stories and cultural variables, and responds more fully . . . to fundamental psychological needs" (156). In brief, stunningly beautiful artwork, compelling narrative, and strong characters win the day.

As a case study, Pascal Lefèvre provides a detailed illustrated reading of Kiriko Nananan's 1994 manga *Kuchizuke (Kisses)* about two women in love. Lefèvre sees Nananan's minimalist, emblematic style as poetry, intense in meaning and symbol, that restructures the temporal or chronological sequence of events to produce a complex, rich world in only nine pages of artwork.

And in an essay that ought to fascinate U.S. readers, Jens Balzer proposes that George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* is, for all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from *shōjo* manga in narrative, character, and page layout. It makes no difference that shōjo manga came later; Balzer suggests that Herriman discovered and developed the same stylistics as did Japan's women shōjo artists starting in the 1970s. The image of Krazy as a gender-indefinite hero/ine of a *shōjo yaoi* tale is original and quite striking—and is an idea that doesn't quickly disappear from the mind.

Each book has other essays as well, all excellent and thoughtful analyses of topics of major interest to all serious thinkers and readers of manga. Each opens vistas that could be taken much further, although length limitations preclude such elaboration. So, finally, reenter the reader. It is up to us to imagine where to take these ideas next. Unlike much writing on the

Web, none of these essays is ephemeral: they are starting points of manga and anime scholarship developing in Japan, Europe, and the United States—gardens, if you like, or seeds. Like the essays in *Mechademia* itself, the essays in these two collections demand and repay our thoughtful attention.

## *Death Note:* The Killer in Me Is the Killer in You

SUSAN NAPIER

Tsugumi Ōba and Takeshi Obata. *Death Note*. Translated by Pookie Rolf, Alexis Kirsch, and Tetsuchiro Miyaki. San Francisco: VIZ Media. Volumes 1–12, 2005–2007. ISBNs for Volumes 1–12: 978-1-4215-0168-0; 978-1-4215-0169-7; 978-1-4215-0170-3; 978-1-4215-0031-8; 978-1-4215-0626-5; 978-1-4215-0627-2; 978-1-4215-0628-9; 978-1-4215-0629-6; 978-1-4215-0630-2; 978-1-4215-1155-9; 978-1-4215-1178-8; 978-1-4215-1327-0. Original Japanese publication, 2003–2006.

I spent two weeks in August, 2008 immersed in *Death Note,* Tsugumi Ōba and Takeshi Obata's extremely popular manga, anime, and live television series that has struck chords throughout Asia and the West. I came away impressed by the work but also strangely nostalgic for the DC comics that I wasted large parts of my youth reading. As some readers may remember, one of the key parts of Superman's "code" was not to kill. This led to many convoluted situations where Superman had to figure out how to capture the bad guy without mortally wounding him (usually it was a "him"), and even to the occasional bait-and-switch story in which it seemed that Superman had (gasp!) violated his code. Of course it all turned out right in the end. I'm not sure if all the other DC superheroes had the same code. In the recent Batman film, *The Dark Knight* (2008), one of the villains points out Batman's major weakness: Batman has rules. Unlike the Joker, whose major fearsomeness lies in having no rules, it seems clear from the movie that one of Batman's "rules" is to avoid killing at all costs.

Let us contrast this with *Death Note,* which in fact has lots of rules, but it also has lots of death. But not just death—the work revolves around killings, almost always premeditated, to the point that it seems that virtually every other page of every one of the twelve-volume series contains a murder. The favorite method of killing is by causing a heart attack, and there are innumerable scenes of people clutching their chests and falling to the ground, but there are also plenty of fiery conflagrations, gunshots, traffic "accidents," and even faked suicides. Thugs are killed. Politicians are killed. Decent honorable men are killed. Beautiful young women are killed. Bullies are killed. Even "heroes" are killed. To be fair, the death agonies are usually not lengthily depicted—after all, a heart attack is a relatively quiet way of dying—but the overall effect of the series is that of a symphony or a tapestry of intentional deaths, woven into a genuinely intriguing, morally provocative, and extremely entertaining quest/mystery narrative.

The premise of *Death Note* is both simple and provocative: floating above the human world is the world of the *shinigami,* gods of death who cause human beings to die by writing their names in notebooks. Occasionally, either by accident or malice, a *shinigami* drops his or her notebook in our world and an innocent human picks it up. In *Death Note,* brilliant and handsome young high school student Yagami Light picks up a notebook dropped by a *shinigami,* who has fortunately written the rules of the Death Note on the cover. The most important rule is the most simple—if you write down the name of a person whose face you know, that person will die of a heart attack within forty seconds. Light later discovers many permutations—the most significant is that he can specify both the time and the manner of a person's death. Then

Ryuk, Light's guardian *shinigami,* explains that should Light wish to give up half his life span, he can obtain "*shinigami* eyes," which let him learn someone's name just by looking at them.

With very little hesitation, Light decides to try out the notebook, first on a criminal who has made the news by holding children hostage, and then on a bully who threatens a young woman. Success! Light decides that the notebook is an instrument of righteousness that will allow him to rid the world of its "rottenness" by allowing him to "execute" criminals and evildoers around the globe. He forthwith starts filling the notebook with name after name. As Light himself is acutely aware, this power has the potential to make him a godlike figure, dealing out "justice" to humanity (whether they want it or not), and giving him the opportunity to create what he believes will be a genuine utopia. This outcome is fine with him. The only problem is that the rest of the world, especially governments and police agencies, disagree with him. In particular, the Tokyo Metropolitan police force (which just happens to include Light's own father in a high position), decides that they must catch the perpetrator (who now calls himself "Kira," from the Japanese pronunciation of the English word *killer*), not knowing, of course, that "Kira" is Light. To accomplish this, they bring in a mysterious and brilliant detective known only as "L." While also young, male, and brilliant, L is in other ways the antithesis of Light. An awkward, odd-looking loner who was brought up in an English orphanage, L lives for the thrill of solving mysteries as much as Light lives for the joy of bringing his brand of righteousness to the world and also, as the plot develops, the pleasure of outwitting L.

This all occurs in the first volume of the manga, setting the stage for the rest of the narrative's action, psychological tension, and moral complexity. On the action front, the series works on several different but exciting levels: First, as a quest saga in which various forces compete to get their hands on the notebook (or, eventually, notebooks); second, as the story of Light's development into a being who hands out death with impunity; third and most enjoyably, as a page-turning cat-and-mouse game between Light and L and, eventually, other forces of good who want to capture Light and the notebook. Even more important than the capture of the notebook is the two geniuses' desire to discover each other's identity, an effort that involves them in ever more complicated strategies.

It is on the third level that the series succeeds most brilliantly as entertainment. The games that Light and L play, although they involve death and destruction, are most interesting as mind games, as we watch two brilliant "players" try to anticipate and outmaneuver each other's every move. Exploiting the notebooks' sometimes complex, sometimes ambiguous rules in combination with L's and Light's formidable intelligence, Ōba does a very impressive job creating a narrative satisfyingly full of just barely believable twists and turns, surprises and revelations. For sheer satisfying complexity, Light and L (and L's followers) make Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty look like simpletons. As with Holmes and Moriarty, furthermore, there is also the pleasure that Light and L are essentially versions of each other—with Light playing the elite schoolboy whose charmed life elicits envy from those around him and L playing an *otaku*-esque character who scares and fascinates people who meet him.

Undoubtedly, the breakneck twists and turns of the game and the intense competitive interplay between the two main characters are probably the main reason for the series' popularity—at one point I was turning the pages so fast I could barely breathe—but the psychological tension and moral complexity also add enormously to the story. Light in particular is an intriguing character, whose desire to rid the world of "rottenness" is viewed by some of the other characters as admirable. At one point even the police force has to acknowledge that crime has gone down 70 percent since Light

started his campaign. Of course, this has been accomplished through frightening people into "goodness," leading to some uncomfortable moral questions concerning free will and how exactly we view human nature.

In some ways, Light's campaign has echoes of the ancient Chinese school of philosophy known as Legalism. As opposed to Confucius, the Legalists believed that humans were inherently evil ("rotten") and needed strong rules and regulations to keep their baser nature under control. In these terms, Light's actions would be literally a godsend, and indeed, by the end of the series, many people have begun to worship Kira.

But the *Death Note* story has a lot to do with present-day Japan and with its current moral, social, and cultural dilemmas, such as the use of the death penalty, the fear of crime, the problem of bullying, and a pervasive sense of meaningless and alienation that seems to affect increasing numbers of contemporary Japanese. The narrative cleverly draws on all these issues to create a densely textured work that revolves around such moral questions as societal safety and equilibrium versus free will and potential chaos, the danger and allure of cult leaders (the scenes in which Kira is worshipped are particularly chilling), and the role of the media in creating these cults and fanning social fears and unrest. In fact, probably the least attractive characters in the whole series are the television moguls who create a "Kira Hour," ostensibly to keep the citizenry informed on Kira's latest doings but actually to use the killings as a means of amplifying their ratings.

To some extent, all the above could apply to any major industrialized society today (with the exception, perhaps, of the death penalty, at least in Europe), but certain elements of *Death Note* may shed particular light on Japanese society. This brings me back to the series' raison d'être—death, or rather killing. Every culture plays its own games with death, and it would be dangerous to say that Japanese society is more death-haunted than, say, the Scandinavian worldview furnished by Ingmar Bergman. And certainly death has played a major role in the work of such illustrious Japanese writers as Soseki, Mishima, and Kawabata. However, excepting the murderous youths in Mishima's *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*,[1] death in these writers' works is usually suicide or accident or related to old age.

Recently, however, in both real life and fiction, murders of a particularly disturbing kind seem to have become far more ubiquitous. The notorious film *Battle Royale* revolves around an entire class of middle-school students who are forced to murder each other as part of a bizarre government ritual.[2] The popular mystery writer Kirino Natsuo specializes in recounting murders by housewives, murders by company executives and, in her most recent English translation, ironically (or perhaps not) titled *Real World,* a matricide committed by a junior high school boy.[3] Even Murakami Haruki, one of Japan's most distinguished living writers, began his recent, well-received novel *Kafka on the Shore* with what was, essentially, a patricide.[4]

It seems likely that this epidemic of fictional murders is related to what seems to be the increasing number of bizarre and grotesque murder incidents, often involving juveniles, that have been occurring in Japan over the past decade. The most notorious of these was when a middle school student murdered another student and stuck his head on a gatepost, but there have, unfortunately, been many others.

It should also be noted that *Death Note* is not simply a fantasy of male empowerment. There is another character who possesses the Death Note: Misa, an attractive young model who is, if anything, even more ruthless than Light. It is through her machinations that L is finally killed. But Misa has her own weaknesses—she is completely in love with Light and dependent on his ambiguous emotional support. In many ways, Misa seems to embody some of the threatening aspects of contemporary Japanese femininity.

Despite her conventional cuteness, she is, at best, amoral, scheming, and cold. Light, on the other hand, simply makes use of her for his own ends. Although there are genuinely warm relationships depicted in *Death Note* (most notably among the police unit assigned to catch Kira), the fact that the only "romantic" relationship depicted in the series is bleakly manipulative underlines its overall nihilistic vision.

So is *Death Note,* with its myriad killings, a reflection of social violence or a wish-fulfilling fantasy that compensates for and critiques the violence in society? Perhaps it is both. Surely, at least some of *Death Note*'s readers must have enjoyed a sense of vicarious satisfaction on reading and viewing the punishment of all those criminals. In a world that seems increasingly chaotic, the notion of a divine force that punishes evildoers could be both compensatory and cathartic. Perhaps it is for this reason that, among the popular figure dolls for sale associated with the series, there are a large number of beautifully detailed *shinigami* in menacing poses. More disturbingly, *Wired* magazine reported cases of "death note" bullying in America and China and an apparent killing inspired by the series in Belgium.[5]

*Death Note*'s narrative is so dense and intriguing, however, that it is likely to have a much longer lifetime than a text that simply reflected certain social elements in contemporary society. For Freudians, the work is a classic example of what Freud calls "the omnipotence of thought," a power that seems particularly attractive to adolescents, a time of life dealing particularly with issues of power and identity. Often "omnipotence of thought" narratives revolve around telepathy or telekinesis, like Stephen King's *Carrie* or Otomo Katsuhiro's *Akira.* In these works, the adolescent heroes are given the deliciously wish-fulfilling power of being able to wreak vengeance on anyone who has abused them. In *Death Note,* not only can Light punish his enemies but he can convince himself he is doing it for a good cause. Light's opponent, the far nerdier L, possesses a different kind of mental omnipotence, the alpha intelligence that allows him to figure out most of Light's actions and reactions.

As for identity issues, these are both personal and perhaps cultural, and the death note itself becomes a fascinating way to explore them. On the one hand, we might see the notebook as what Alfred Hitchcock used to call a "McGuffin," the ultimately meaningless object that sets the narrative going. But, while the notebook does indeed function as a McGuffin, it also embodies philosophical questions. In a phenomenological sense, the notebook creates its own complex meaning. It is an immensely powerful object of desire, a bit like the One Ring in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* but, with its pages and pages of carefully written names and death dates, it is also an object onto which identity is literally but lethally projected. Furthermore, due to Light's unwillingness to trade life span for the ability to see potential victim's names, much of the action is taken up with his attempts to find an individual's correct name so he or she can be killed. It is Light's inability to see L's true name that allows L to avoid death for so long.

Why are names so important? As one of my colleagues has pointed out, recent works by Murakami Haruki, most notably *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle,*[6] also revolve heavily around naming and identity. As with *Death Note,* false names are often used for purposes of safety and subterfuge, but it is revealing that the estranged wife of the hero disguises herself and asks him to find out her name, in hopes of rescuing her from the hell in which she is imprisoned. In contrast, in *Death Note,* the power to name, i.e., to recognize identity, becomes the power to kill, to expunge identity.

At a time when people increasingly use false or alternative identities in cyberspace, perhaps it makes sense that real names should take on nearly iconic properties. In its perverse way, therefore, *Death Note* may be a call to protect

our individuality in a world where the special character of individuals seems increasingly under threat. After all, one reason Superman and Batman have been around so long is that they have successfully protected their secret identities. In *Death Note,* "secret" identities are all ultimately revealed, and it is finally the *shinigami* who have the last laugh.

### Notes

1. Mishima Yukio, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

2. *Battle Royale* is a novel by Koushun Takami that was later made into two live action films and a manga. See http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/anime.php?id=2971 and http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/manga.php?id=68 (both accessed September 22, 2008).

3. Natsuo Kirino, *Real World* (New York: Vintage, 2008).

4. Murakami Haruki, *Kafka on the Shore* (New York: Vintage, 2006).

5. Lisa Katayama, "*Death Note* Manga Spawns Movie, Crime Wave." *Wired,* May 19, 2008, http://www.wired.com/entertainment/hollywood/news/2008/05/death_note (accessed August 27, 2008).

6. Murakami Haruki, *Wind Up Bird Chronicle* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

## トレンド
## Torendo
### Otakuology: A Dialogue

PATRICK W. GALBRAITH AND THOMAS LAMARRE

**PATRICK W. GALBRAITH:** Thank you for agreeing to this dialogue, which I hope will open some new perspectives on the study of otaku, or "otakuology." With the transnational success of manga, anime, and Japanese videogames, the term "otaku" has become common across a variety of popular discourses, as a sort of identity designating the consumers or users of these products. But I believe that we've come to an impasse in our discussions of otaku, precisely because the term has become so familiar and ubiquitous that we run the risk of naturalizing an otaku identity without exploring its significance for our understanding of the interactions of culture, technology, and economy. With this goal in mind, I would like to begin by asking about your academic interests in general.

**THOMAS LAMARRE:** My general interests lie in the history of perception. So my basic questions are about how people perceive the world, how they experience it, at different historical junctures. These kinds of questions grow out of intellectual history. But the history of perception, sensation, or experience is different from the history of ideas. The history of ideas can rest content with an archive of texts or documents that are clearly established as philosophical, theoretical, or intellectual in nature. The history of perception or experience, however, turns to a broad range of materials that were traditionally ignored by historians—the stuff of everyday life. This makes for a vastly expanded empiricism. In fact, the archive threatens to become unmanageable. Histories of experience or perception have tended to turn to "aesthetic" materials that range across art history, literary studies, and media studies—art, visual culture, design, media, architecture, and all sorts of texts, fictional, philosophical, pedagogical, and discursive. The basic goal is to unearth the contours of a historically specific set of material orientations that guide or shape patterns of experience, or the material orientations that set up a field of possibilities. My interest in the history of specific sets of material orientations has gradually led to a focus on media, especially those associated with technologies of the moving image.

**PG:** I also am interested in material conditions, but I chose to conduct extended participant

observation in Akihabara, an area of Tokyo associated with otaku, because I wished to introduce the voices of otaku into our discussions. Even in Japan, the voices of otaku have been largely missing from academic discourse. The term "otaku" began to appear in popular texts and "New Academism" in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but there was, and still are, very few examples of those identified as otaku speaking for themselves. Akihabara presents one narrow window onto one small segment of otaku culture, insofar as we imagine it to exist, and that window is anything but clear. Still, it offers a place to start to consider how otaku speak about themselves. How did you become interested in otaku?

**TL:** When I first went to Japan in the late 1980s, I developed a love for manga and anime. So when I started teaching at McGill in the early 1990s, I offered a course on Japanese popular culture in which I tried to introduce students to manga and anime. There were not many anime with subtitles and very few manga in translation at that time, so it was tough putting together a decent syllabus. What surprised me was that a large number of the students loathed the materials, complaining that they were juvenile, incomprehensible, misogynistic, or worse. Also, the late 1980s and 1990s were a time of major transition in discourses on otaku in Japan, particularly with the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989, which encouraged a general pathologization of otaku in the media. As a result, even though my interests led me toward anime, manga, and so-called otaku culture, it took years of teaching and reading for me to make the connection between my interest in the history of perception and my interest in the otaku stuff.

A great deal conspired against making such connections, not least of which is the fact that there was not, until the late 1990s, any sense of a historical or theoretical perspective on otaku. In the mass media, the general trend was to sensationalize, exoticize, or demonize what was happening between fans and their "image worlds." In the university, as you noted, the general trend was to read anime and manga in the manner of literary texts. Yet, even when commentators were reading anime as texts, they tended to shy away from the tough questions that arise in literary analysis, which would have opened their analysis to questions about materiality, material conditions, identity, subject formation, power formations, or powers of the body. Anime especially was treated as a textual object that does not or cannot pose any difficult textual or historical questions. Except for a very few works, analysis tended to be relegated to re-presenting anime narratives, almost in the manner of book reports or movie reviews. At the very moment when new historicism, radical historicism, post-Marxism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction introduced very important and challenging questions into the study of literature, many scholars seemed to jump onto the pop-culture bandwagon as if determined to avoid the sorts of questions posed by these approaches, as well as the questions that you're asking through participant observation, or those that I wish to pose at the level of history of experience and material orientations. Nonetheless, we shouldn't suppose that looking at otaku presents in and of itself an intellectual advance. And there are a number of other factors that have encouraged a shift away from textual analysis toward ethnographic questions about otaku activities.

**PG:** Absolutely. The trend toward studying Japanese popular culture demands closer consideration. After the end of the Cold War and the Bubble Economy, the imperative to study Japan greatly diminished. Japan could no longer be discussed in terms of its threat, be it military or economic in nature. Scholars of Japanese literature turned to popular culture in the 1990s in an attempt to invigorate the field, partly attracted to its mass appeal, which made both for

publishing opportunities and increased student interest. There was also new funding from institutions eager to compensate for Japan's shrinking political and economic significance. Basic questions—why we study Japan and why study its popular culture—were swept aside, as Japan studies overcame its crisis by turning to new popular topics. As you mentioned, popular culture seemed to offer a way to avoid facing difficult questions about the history of area studies and postwar politics. Keeping Japan popular—that is, appealing yet unchallenging—allowed and still allows for the US–Japan relationship to continue largely unaltered. Studies of Japanese popular culture have become an academic commodity. Observed from a functionalist and perhaps cynical standpoint, the fact of studying Japan threatens to become more important than the content of the studies, and popularity more important than academic rigor. Indeed, many of those writing on Japanese popular culture today are young; they are outside the academy and publishing in popular venues. Many of those writing on popular culture work part time in universities, where there is a demand for them to teach specialty courses but no place for them in the permanent faculty. Owing to the lack of long-term expectations and professional integration, few demands are placed on popular scholarship. Scholars working on Japanese popular culture are only distinguished by the quantity of their publications and the novelty of their topics, which conditions a preference for niche subjects, which are analyzed by applying simplified superstructures. The result is a tendency toward exoticizing and essentializing. This tendency often reflects or even reproduces sensationalist journalism about Japan. This is very clear in the context of otaku. Definitions are set up on the basis of "otaku" in Japan, but often with little or no contact with these imagined others, and there is a critical lack of engagement with experts in Japan. Thus discussions of otaku repeat assumptions about unique, even bizarre habits and practices. And such assumptions go unquestioned, because Japanese uniqueness is *the last remaining* rationale for continued study of Japan itself. Japan appears as the quintessential "non-Western" example. Given such difficulties, how can we improve on the study of otaku?

**TL:** It is impossible to avoid the impulse to define otaku, and any account of otaku will by default imply some kind of definition. Yet it seems to me that we need to be more cautious and critical about definitions of otaku. I don't mean critical only in the sense of showing how someone gets the definition wrong. I think that we also need to look at how the process of defining to some extent creates its object. So it is not a matter of saying to someone, "Look, you're not defining otaku properly," but of considering how the definition sets the parameters for discussion. This is especially important in the case of otaku, because the mass media has played an important role, and maybe *the* most important role, in setting the parameters for discussion. And the mass media tends to construct easily recognizable types. We end up with a typology of otaku, which encourages us to think about otaku in very naïve psychological or behavioral terms, and to generate and embrace stereotypes. This tendency toward typology has also encouraged a massive simplification of anthropological and sociological approaches in talking about otaku culture. Often the definition of otaku is presumed in advance and never questioned openly, as if we all implicitly understood who and what otaku are. Often commentators present themselves as otaku in order to authorize their knowledge—they present themselves as native informants. The problem is not that commentators wish to situate themselves as otaku writing about otaku. The problem is that such a stance tends to make definitions of otaku appear self-evident, while reinforcing received stereotypes. It is often calculated to prevent or foreclose questions about how we define otaku, rather than to invite them.

**PG:** I'd like to highlight the issue of labeling. As popularized in the media, the word *otaku* was pejorative from the outset. In 1983, in "'*Otaku*' *no kenkyū*," an article for *Tokyo Otona Club* that appeared as a special supplementary issue of *Manga Burikko* magazine, Nakamori Akio expressed his shock over what he perceived to be the bizarre behavior of *dōjinshi* fans at a convention. They spoke to one another using "otaku," a polite and slightly archaic second-person pronoun, which made them look socially awkward to his eyes. Nakamori then proceeds to belittle these fans using common images of social rejects—the nerd, weirdo, fat kid, momma's boy, and so on. As Nakamori puts it, you know these people from your school days, you've seen them around town. And he names them, all of them, otaku, a convenient, arbitrary label for all those he perceived to be social rejects. *Manga Burikko* was a subcultural magazine, one including parody manga, and fans of anime and manga were beginning to imagine a shared identity in this and other specialty magazines. There was a strong backlash against Nakamori's comments, and a debate raged in the reader-response section of the magazine, spawning three additional articles on otaku. Although the debate continued until 1984, editor Ōtsuka Eiji finally canceled the column. He later explained that he had done so because he came to see Nakamori's use of "otaku" as part of a personal image campaign, as way to define himself as part of the "new breed" (*shinjinrui*) or cool youth culture. Ōtsuka concludes that the word *otaku* was becoming part of the ongoing "game of differentiation" (*saika no gēmu*).

The word *otaku* continued to circulate, as evidenced by its appearance in a Recruit survey on youth personality in 1985, but it was not widely used among anime and manga fans. Indeed, although the mass media widely described serial killer Miyazaki Tsutomu as an "otaku" in 1989, Ōsawa Masachi points out that Miyazaki himself did not know the meaning of the word. Ōtsuka also wonders if the widely disseminated photos of Miyazaki's "otaku room," filled with 5,763 videotapes, might not have been staged by police and journalists in order to connect the gruesome crimes to the rising anxiety about "virtual reality" and media effects. We need to be aware that the word *otaku* is inextricably tied to media discourse. This is also true for "positive" images of "otaku." It is no coincidence that Okada Toshio, one of the founding members of animation studio Gainax, started his infamous otakuology lectures at the University of Tokyo in 1992. At the height of "otaku bashing," Okada and other fans claimed they themselves had abandoned the word *otaku* a decade earlier, and yet otaku bashing made the term so popular that Okada could use it to garner attention, titling himself "Otakingu" or the King of Otaku. Okada also claimed that otaku were the heirs of Japanese culture and the next stage of human evolution. This at times almost smacks of parody, as in his *Otaku no Video,* but it also was a political move made with full expectation of media response. Indeed, no definition of otaku is entirely unproblematic, and all should be considered in context.

In producing knowledge about otaku, we run the risk of imposing static categories to facilitate analysis. I find myself confronting this in the context of ethnographic inquiry. Kam Thiam Huat points out that when we go into the field looking for otaku, we select those who match internalized stereotypes. Someone is only an otaku insofar as he or she is imagined to be. The ones doing the imagining can be them, others, or us, but in any case someone identifies the person as an otaku. For Kam, fluctuations in the word *otaku* over the years are based not in changes in people or activities but rather in changing perceptions of play and consumption. "Otaku" was perceived in the 1980s and 1990s in terms of flight from roles and responsibilities associated with family, school, and work. Thus otaku seemed to threaten the integrity of the social. The same behaviors are now seen

as inevitable or even desirable. The meaning of otaku continues to change.

**TL:** In response to such difficulties in defining otaku, some critics in Japan have introduced terms such as *otaku-kei bunka* (otaku-type culture) and *otaku-kankei shôhi* (otaku-related consumption). I am thinking especially of Azuma Hiroki, author of *Dōbutsu ka suru posutomodan* (Animalizing Postmodernity, released in translation in 2009 as *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*). I feel that we should follow through the implications of such an approach, even if Azuma himself does not necessarily do so. The idea would be to consider otaku as a new mode of social existence, as a kind of social being. This means that studying otaku is not only a matter of collecting information about people whose behavior appears to conform to stereotypes generated in the mass media, or about interviewing people who declare themselves otaku, who adopt it as an identity. Even while we acknowledge the importance and necessity of such data gathering, we also need to look at the emergence of a new set of social relations and to consider how our knowledge procedures interact with those social relations.

Even though I am using the terms "existence" or "being," it is not an ontology of otaku that is at stake. It is a matter of looking at where divisions are emerging, where something is contested. You implied that the label "otaku" is a discursive construction. At the same time, you suggested that those labeled otaku either did not accept the appellation (actual fans) or used it in a strategic or tactical manner (Okada Toshio). This implies that there are effects of power associated with mass media discourses on otaku, which appear where otaku discourse is being contested or redirected. A question then arises about the specific material conditions and limits for this otaku discourse. How is it different from other discourses? When I suggest that we see otaku as a mode of social existence, my goal is not to generate an ontological definition for otaku but to bring critical attention to bear on the specificity of otaku activities or practices. If we think in terms of activities and practices, then it is clear that the otaku mode of social being may become highly condensed and very visible in certain locations and social relations and within specific populations. But it touches everyone. Of course, we might also conclude that, because values associated with otaku are constantly changing, there is no consistency to otaku at all, in which case we should drop the study of otaku altogether, because everything is happening elsewhere. But I do think that there is some consistency or coherence to what is called otaku, and that is why I refer it to as mode of social existence.

On this basis, I think that we can relate the otaku phenomenon to transformations in capitalism, to changes in how we interact with and through commodities, and to transformations in technologies, especially communications and information technologies. These transformations also pose a challenge to how we envision the role of intellectual activities and scholarship. Given my interest in historically specific sets of material orientations, or perception grounded in media and media technologies, I tend to stress these parameters when looking at otaku as a mode of social existence. For me, then, "otaku" implies at least three problematics. First, there are new kinds of images and image flows associated with the emergence of a series of new media technologies from the VCR to the DVD player and personal computer. Second, there is a new set of relations to those images and image flows, which has gradually shaped a form of knowledge production around them. This knowledge production is as abstract, encyclopedic, totalizing, and rational as the heyday of Enlightenment thought and practices, yet is novel in the intensity of its engagement with the "open source." Third, otaku entails a transformation in our relations to commodities and consumption. It is commonplace in discussions of the postmodern to talk about consumption

taking priority over production, or of a collapse of the difference between production and consumption. Otaku consumption, for instance, is so active and productive that it is difficult to bring it under the banner of consumption in the traditional sense of an acquisition and using up of discrete objects. Otaku does not entail acquiring and then abandoning, "wasting," or "destroying" commodities. Rather, commodities function more like events and thus entail worlds to be prolonged, which would at the same time imply the prolongation of a set of social relations.

**PG:** The idea of consumption as an event is in keeping with otaku descriptions of their activities in terms of *matsuri,* or "festival." Many otaku use *matsuri* to describe the group dynamic that forms around special events, or the discussions and activities that develop around *neta,* which are *faits-divers* or "newsy" items of interest, of a sort that a comedian might also draw into his or her performance. Connections emerge and spaces of interaction arise as people share the moment—as in *matsuri.* As you say, the festival-like emergence of such "worlds" is very much tied to communication technology. The *matsuri*-like communities of 2channel and Nico Nico Dōga would not be possible without computers and Internet access. Connections are on the surface of the screen, and the technological mediation is evident. But these dynamics do not end at the screen—they also occur in the so-called real world. With otaku activities, we probably do better not to posit a strict boundary between the screen and the real world. People perform dances from anime series, stage recreations of popular online videos, and make "pilgrimages" to places seen in anime. They also gather to buy and sell goods inspired by favorite characters. Comiket, the biannual sales event for *dōjinshi* (material published outside official channels), draws 35,000 creative "circles" and over half a million people. Yes, these circles frequently draw on mainstream commercial characters in their "parody" works, but what they create is distinctive. This is very much open-source remix culture. I was discussing this with a friend from Rome, who pointed out that only a handful of people contributed to the European Renaissance, while a thousand times that number contribute to Comiket and Wonder Festival (a *dōjin* figure event). He thus proposed an "otaku renaissance," which entails cultural production on an unprecedented scale. For some reason many people appear willing to invest great energy in hobbies over long periods of time. They are not alienated from their labor, but their labor serves as a source of innovation and financial profit for companies. Given the scale of these events in Japan, or rather Tokyo, we can safely say that the otaku social mode is highly visible. Why did otaku appear in Japan first, and why are they most visible in Japan?

**TL:** Some critics stress the Japaneseness or Japanese origins of otaku culture (Okada Toshio, Morikawa Kaichirō, Ōtsuka Eiji). Others (Azuma Hiroki, Sawaragi Noi) argue that, on the contrary, the Japaneseness of otaku culture is "fake" rather than authentic and that it has developed in response to the insurgency of American pop culture in postwar Japan. Nonetheless, across these debates, the nation typically appears as the frame of reference for discussing otaku. Naturally, because Japan–U.S. military and economic relations continue to shape the everyday realities of Japan, it is not surprising that discussions of Japanese fan cultures would turn in this direction. But a problem arises. Where the model of subculture versus hegemony allows for the possibility of conflict and resistance within the nation, discussions of otaku tend to discount otaku or fan cultures as a source of difference internal to the nation. Instead the emphasis falls on abnormal or deviant tendencies of the nation, which assumes by default that there can be a normal and healthy nation, with the presumption that

Japan may have been more normal and healthier before the advent of otaku.

The problem then is not that the nation and national sovereignty tend to provide a horizon for understanding otaku but that the national form is naturalized, rather than interrogated. As a result, in Japanese discourses, even when the transnational dimension of otaku culture is acknowledged, differences between nations and national values (say, Japanese otaku values versus American otaku values) receive a great deal more attention than do differences within nations and across nations (say, information access, purchasing power, gender, class, or other forms of social difference). To counter such a reification of Japan, I would like to call attention to some contributing factors that are institutional and structural, and historically contingent.

First there is the emergence of what might be called mass intellectuality in the postwar years. As Kotani Mari points out in her account of *shōjo* in *Tekuno-goshikku* (Techno-Gothic), a chapter of which appeared in translation in *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire*, the intellectual pursuits and "cultivation" that were largely the preserve of the middle and upper middle class in prewar Japan became widespread after the war, with the expansion of literacy, wealth, and access to media such as newspapers and television. Something similar happened in other parts of the world with increased wealth and literacy. Autonomia school theorists frequently refer us to Marx's discussion of the "general intellect" to understand this historical shift, and Maurizo Lazarrato describes this moment in terms of the emergence of "mass intellectuality."

A second factor gave this expansion a particular inflection in Japan—hobby culture. By hobby culture I mean not only the importance given to having a hobby, but also the institutional support for clubs or circles within high schools and universities. While there isn't necessarily a great deal of financial support for them, clubs are an integral part of daily life, especially in universities, where students are rewarded for their years of labor in high school with greater leisure time. Such university circles frequently contribute to the formation of circles at Comiket and other fan events. It is no accident that Gainax got its start through the Osaka Science Fiction convention, which was organized by a college sci-fi club. Similar organizational skills contributed to the formation of Comiket, Wonder Festival, and other events.

Third, while the fortunes of its culture industries have waxed and waned, Japan not only has well-established film, animation, manga, and television industries, but also imports entertainment from a number of locales. Japanese producers and consumers have long had a high degree of literacy in American, Hong Kong, Chinese, and European entertainment, alongside literacy in the hybrid conventions of film, manga, and animation expression established in Japan from the 1930s. The result is a heightened awareness of genre conventions across national boundaries, as well as of modes of address that are decidedly international or global, even when the target audience is Japanese. This kind of global address was not recognized as such in some parts of the world until the 1990s, because the Hollywood industries had effectively promoted themselves as the only bearers of global address by controlling international distribution networks. There is still great reluctance to acknowledge the global address of Japanese entertainment. As Ōtsuka Eiji astutely points out, Miyazaki Hayao's animated films, for instance, are decidedly global entertainment, and the desire to recode them as distinctively Japanese simply plays into the formation of a Studio Ghibli brand. We need to consider how modes of address can be at once local and global and to address actual processes of universalization.

Fourth, discourses on information society emerged early in Japan—in the 1960s. Even if information society may have been slow in its realization in Japan, there was an important

discursive engagement with, and critical enthusiasm for, information society in conjunction with an insistence on Japan's natural disposition toward robots and the roboticization of society. The conceptualization of Japan as a robot kingdom had a profound impact on mecha otaku, that is, fans interested in armored vehicles and suits, tactical armor, and piloted robots.

Fifth, in keeping with the American decision to make Japan a "bulwark against communism" through high capitalist growth, the Japanese economic miracle made Tokyo into a global city, one of the most capital-saturated urban areas in the world. Industrial planners set out to make Japan a distinctive export economy and, due to space limitations, tended to direct patterns of consumption toward appliances and electronics. At the same time, an unprecedented amount of capital was allocated to advertising, packaging, design, and image production. As a result, although the world of Japanese promotion still tends to operate on the basis of large categories targeted toward specific masses (*shōnen, shōjo, seinen,* and so on) or national masses, consumption in Japan rapidly fragmented into what some commentators call "micromasses." These micromasses attain a degree of social, discursive, and even institutional solidity through the formation of clubs and circles, through the spread of intellectuality, and through the wealth of competing genre conventions. Add information technologies and stir well and you'll get a mode of social being that encourages the proliferation of otaku-related micromass lifestyles. Otaku in this respect is not mass culture but rather a personalization or life stylization. But I am groping for words here. I don't wish to imply that these micromasses are merely lifestyles or a matter of personalization in Jean Baudrillard's sense. They entail a degree of performative self-cultivation or what Michel Foucault called "technologies of the self," without implying the formation of fixed subject position or identity.

**PG:** Life stylization is one way to put it. Could this also perhaps be called subculture? After all, since Dick Hebdige's classic work in 1979, the expression of stylistic difference has often been associated with alternatives to hegemonic norms.

**TL:** Otaku are frequently cited as a prime instance of subculture, but the question for me is: What do we mean by "subculture"? In Anglo-American cultural studies, subculture usually carries connotations of the marginal or the non-normative, and of resistance to mass or mainstream culture. Subculture has different connotations in Japan. Generally speaking, in Japanese discussions the emphasis often falls on subculture as "small," both in terms of the number of producers and consumers and in terms of its concerns (intimate and petty). Which is to say, because its numbers were small, a subculture was not seen to address the larger concerns of Japanese society and the nation. Subculture was construed as a retreat from questions about world history and sovereignty. Consequently, subculture could be seen as a harbinger of the end of the history and of the nation, rather than, say, as a set of practices entailing resistance to dominant modes of understanding the world and organizing social relations.

Nonetheless, an understanding of subculture drawing on Anglo-American debates has entered the Japanese debates. In her essay in this volume, Anne McKnight maps the contours of some of these debates on subculture in Japan, calling attention to a tension that emerges between these two ways of looking at subculture. On the one hand, there is the view of subculture evident in Ōtsuka Eiji's studies of otaku, including his piece in this volume, in which the smallness of subculture is a sign of the disappearance of the public sphere, of debates on sovereignty and modernity, and of a concern for Japan's position in the world and world history. On the other hand, there is the view of subculture evident in Ueno Toshiya's

writings, in which the emphasis falls on the differential production of identities by creatively and defiantly patching together a new set of tribal social relations.

For my part, I like the challenge that Japanese debates on subculture pose to the now rather entrenched assumption of subculture as resistance that reigns in Anglo-American studies. Generally speaking, Japanese stances on subculture show less romanticism about escaping capitalism and fewer presumptions about getting outside it. Nonetheless, I think that there must be a middle way that acknowledges both tendencies within the Japanese subculture debates, which would take seriously the question of whether there can be zones of autonomy within capitalist societies, and what impact these might have. What sort of opportunities does the internal differentiation of global capitalism visible in the formation of fan cultures present for the emergence of different political or social possibilities?

**PG:** In a conference held in Tokyo in 2009, Miyadai Shinji and Azuma Hiroki suggested that subculture in the Japanese sense means anything that is not recognized as high culture. So, in effect, popular, mass, and commercial culture all might be subculture. They also resisted the urge to politicize subculture in any form. Their definition seems to be ignoring the concerns that you raised, conflating micro and mass cultural phenomena, which renders otaku "subculture" quite ambiguous. If otaku subculture is about interaction with mass/commercial/popular culture, then it might be better described as fan culture. I am specifically thinking about Matt Hills's discussion of cult fans. Like you, Hills has questioned whether these sorts of cultures are about resistance. Taking up the concept of a "dialectic of value," he proposes fans tend toward "anti-commercial ideologies and commodity-completist practices." I have the impression that otaku cultures display less ambivalence toward mass culture than Hills sees in his cultures. But Hills nonetheless allows for fan practices that defy commercial or mainstream logic. Lawrence Eng has suggested that otaku in the United States are also somehow resistant, as these "reluctant insiders" of the middle class are engaged in unanticipated consumption and appropriation of media and technology. They transgress boundaries in a way that is not entirely incongruent with Japanese otaku. This is a topic that deserves further attention. How do you position otaku in the discussion of fans?

**TL:** For a long time, fans were seen as mere consumers of what was produced, including the dominant meanings implicit in products. Cultural studies transformed this paradigm, showing how fans were in fact active receivers, in the sense that fans contributed actively to the production of meaning. Otaku might thus be seen as an intensification of these active modes of reception, because the hallmark of otaku is not only heightened consumption—connoisseurship, discrimination, collecting—but also a sort of production. This otaku productivity entails both knowledge production—collating, classifying, disseminating, commenting, annotating, translating—and "unofficial" material production, for example the *dōjin* scene. What's more, so-called amateur productions frequently make money and sometimes creators go professional. In sum, rather than a strict divide between ordinary fans and otaku, or between otaku consumers and corporate producers, there is a spectrum of productivity. In Japanese discussions of otaku, there is a tendency to insist on consumption and to use the term "otaku" in order to delineate "fans" or "cult fans" from ordinary people or mainstream culture. "Otaku" is a term commonly deployed to construct and to patrol a boundary between normal or ordinary consumption on the one hand, and excessive or abnormal consumption on the other hand. As such, in various contexts, the term "otaku" can be evoked either to demonize or to celebrate a certain set of consumer activities that are

loosely associated with certain kinds of people. Such a way of using the term "otaku"—to separate normal from abnormal—tends to gravitate toward an identity politics based on affirming one's ordinariness or extraordinariness. For my purposes, such distinctions are interesting in terms of their social effects but not very helpful in the context of thinking the productivity of fans, because their primary effect is to invite moralizing about consumption. Everything begins and ends with a moral question: Are we consuming too much or too little? Such a moralizing stance serves to disavow the excesses of capital by assuming that it is indeed possible to successfully manage capital by practicing moral restraint.

**PG:** Do you see any change in the meaning of otaku?

**TL:** There is a straightforward way of telling the story of otaku as the explosion of ignored or largely dismissed products and activities into the national and global mainstream. The arrest of the serial killer Miyazaki resulted in a wave of demonization and pathologization of otaku-related activities in the mass media in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Subsequently, the astounding financial success of otaku-related goods associated with Gainax's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in the mid-1990s, in conjunction with the increased international visibility of anime, manga, and video games meant that such activities could not be ignored, for commercial and diplomatic reasons, even if the mass media remained somewhat suspicious about what otaku were really doing. The success of *Densha Otoko* (*Train Man*) as a film and TV series in 2005 signaled the possibility of a complete redemption and mass appropriation of the otaku phenomenon. On the one hand, it told the story of an otaku who managed to overcome the antisocial qualities associated with "otakudom" and win the girl, while, on the other hand, it had the cachet of emerging from informal Internet exchanges and proliferating across mass media with great commercial success.

But telling the story of otaku as exclusion followed by acceptance and redemption is not entirely satisfactory in that it presumes a succession of stages, by reference almost exclusively to mass media and the nation. There are, in fact, many different channels of communication and ways of communicating. So, even as the government acknowledges the importance of male otaku and strives to pin it down in its public policies, many otaku-related groups refuse to accept the new discourses and definitions. The history of otaku, then, is not one of an initial misunderstanding and rejection, followed by recognition and success. There is a continuing negotiation between different paths of communication, some of which are mass-targeted, some of which are localized and intimate. In other words, the meaning of otaku has changed significantly in government policies and mass media, yet prior meanings persist, and new articulations are emerging.

**PG:** Otaku are today often imagined as men, especially Japanese otaku. This is strange, because Nakamori Akio's definition, the starting point for much of the discourse on otaku, included men and women. Female fans were and are a major presence in *dōjinshi* culture, after all. However, we now seem to suffer from collective amnesia. The image of otaku as male spread rapidly along with media reports on Miyazaki Tsutomu. This is incidentally also where the connotations of otaku being lost in virtual reality and sexually suspect, even predatory, come in. The rising profile of female otaku and *fujoshi*, the so-called "rotten girls" who produce and consume stories about romance between beautiful boys, compels us to begin reconsidering gendered stereotypes of fandom in Japan.

It is a little unnerving just how loose the use of "otaku" really is, while at the same time how contested it is. When we say "otaku," there are myriad possible meanings. Otaku starts as

just a way to say "you" with the original kanji character "taku" and honorific "o" (お宅) and then takes on the meaning of subculture when rendered in hiragana (おたく). This is most often used in a negative way, since it is tied to Nakamori Akio and Miyazaki Tsutomu. Otaku can also refer to foreign fans of Japanese popular culture when written in roman letters (otaku). At first, it was positive. Fred Schodt points out that the word *otaku* appeared on the cover of *Wired* magazine in 1993, and the United States has a convention, Otacon, a documentary, *Otaku Unite!* and a magazine, *Otaku USA*, that evoke the imagined community. Finally, "otaku" loses its "cultural odor" when written in katakana (オタク). This last iteration was popularized by Okada's *Otakugaku no Nyûmon* (Introduction to otakuology) in 1996 and was part of his attempt to jettison associations with the heinous crimes of Miyazaki Tstuomu. At the same time, katakana tends to be used for foreign loanwords, new language, or slang. This is how the word *otaku* appears in media and government reports on "cool Japan," thus making otaku appear international. The word *otaku* evokes multiple contradictory discourses and images. No one definition is sufficient, and all are based in stereotypes that essentialize some "otaku" and exclude others. Some Japanese scholars are very critical of the internationalization of "otaku." In your experience, what are the differences and similarities between otaku in Japan and abroad?

**TL:** If we look at the otaku phenomenon in terms of the emergence of a new mode of social existence that is related to transformations in capitalism and in technologies, then the enthusiastic reception of Japanese otaku activities in other sites around the globe is not so surprising. Again, in contrast with discussions of otaku that see in them nonordinary or excessive consumption that at the same time adheres to national boundaries, which tends to push discussion in the direction of national morality and comparison of national values, I think that the otaku mode is not only ordinary but also transnational at heart. The actual conventions of expression, technologies, and flows of capital are transnational, and this particular intersection of capital and technology tends to address and define people as populations. As a result, the otaku mode acts in terms of multiplicities, building them into its operative logic. This means that the phenomenon cannot be confined to one territory. Even if we can identify territorial variations, the otaku mode is not entirely localizable, and thus entails a constant deterritorialization.

Put another way, otaku forms are *opened in translation*. We're accustomed to thinking in terms of something being lost in translation, some sort of ineffable essence. This is because we're still under the sway of national language paradigms in thinking translation, which is thoroughly anachronistic in the context of otaku and global circulation. Certainly, translations of otaku forms of expression from the Japanese involve changing the original, and there are also questions about the localization of Japanese products. Yet, as Japanese debates about otaku suggest in their concerns about the loss of a national and world historical framework, otaku cultures are not primarily a matter of nations communicating with nations but of locales communicating via the global.

Needless to say, nations and the international mechanisms of sovereignty have not disappeared from the scene, and there is thus a continual interplay between them and transnational mechanisms. Crudely put, it boils down to interplay between national language translation and transnational media circulation, in which circulation implies other registers of material translation—file conversion, for instance. This interplay has to be taken into account when considering the differences between otaku in Japan and outside Japan. We need to think translation beyond the linguistic register, even though language, in the narrow sense of

national speech, has a tendency to "overcode" other material registers, for historical as well as psychological reasons. Your example of the katakana transformation of the term "otaku" into a foreign loanword within national policy speaks to this overcoding of otaku activities by reference to a distinction between native and foreign. The persistent tendency toward linguistic overcoding of material activities makes the dynamics of fansub and scanlation groups very interesting and important in gauging the interplay of the international and transnational. In sum, the national form has not been surpassed, nor is it irrelevant. In fact, it often steps in to police such transnational flows, building an alliance between security and population control and national sovereignty.

**PG:** Matt Hills suggests the word *otaku* has become a "shifter," or "a mobile sign of self and other." Stereotypical images such as "Japan," "the West," "otaku" and "non-otaku," are activated and deactivated as part of the ongoing process of making meaning. Even as we talk about transnational flows, receivers can reinscribe boundaries even as they transgress them. This sort of boundary play might be part of the appeal. As you mentioned, we want to read Studio Ghibli as Japanese, and they capitalize on that desire, but we also read universal values into it. And there is no shortage of people in Japan who want to assert that this global popular culture is Japanese in origin. Hills is talking about how anime fans interact with "Japan" and use the otaku label outside Japan, but I think his points are also relevant for considering the situation inside Japan.

At the same time, some otaku today describe themselves as "*wotaku*" (ヲタク) in a conscious effort to break free of associations with subculture and pop culture, to cast off the domestic and international baggage attached to "otaku." They are media savvy and information hungry, with a flair for fan productions, and appear almost random or chaotic in their pursuit of "*moe*," a euphoric response to fictional characters. Okada finds this group so reprehensible that he wrote a book to them in 2008 titled *Otaku wa sudeni shindeiru*, which translates to "you are already dead." Inside, he refers to the cultural death of otaku, or what he perceives as a break between otaku of his generation and otaku today. Given that sci-fi fans of Okada's generation likely weren't calling themselves otaku, or might have used it as an insult, this seems an almost predictable conclusion. Ironically, Okada became a public "otaku" figure, and he was in many ways tied to the growing media discourse on otaku and the growing sense of community among anime and manga fans in the 1990s. What's your opinion on his stance?

**TL:** It seems to me that, at one level, discourses on otaku in Japan have placed so much emphasis on generational differences that the idea of radical ruptures is always central to how otaku cultures are imagined. So it is not surprising that, rather than imagine yet another generation of otaku, Okada would propose a radical break with otaku itself, the death of otaku. The idea of radical generational breaks is built into the discourse, and media commentators in Japan are adept at proclaiming new breaks and generating new types. Recently, the effect of generating new types has been largely to castigate youth for a perceived decline in Japan's status. Similarly, Okada detects a loss of engagement, commitment and pride among would-be otaku that for him signals cultural demise.

At another level, Okada is also reacting against the mass media and government appropriation of otaku activities, which brings them into the public sphere and recodes them in terms of national values. Okada went to great lengths to legitimate otaku activities, but he apparently does not want otaku to become too big or too mainstream. One of the underlying assumptions of Okada's discussion of otaku is that community depends on numerical smallness, and community ceases to exist when it

is no longer quantitatively small. At the same time, smallness for Okada becomes too small when it does not appear cohesive or coherent and thus creative. If otaku are for him already dead, it is because they have become at once too big and too small, without community and creativity, and thus chaotic and incomprehensible as a population.

Okada's remarks bring us to the limits of thinking otaku in terms of generations, to the point where we might productively shift from the quantitative to the qualitative, and look at the otaku mode of social existence in terms of the intimacy of its media connection and social relations. Genuine intimacy and sociality would demand that something be at risk. In effect, however indirectly, Okada is posing a question about what is at risk, or what is at stake, in certain modes of media consumption today. This is not a trivial question. But it cannot be answered simply by referring to the death of otaku, or by insisting, as other commentators do, that the irresponsibility of youth is responsible for a perceived decline of the Japanese nation.

**PG:** A perceived loss of creativity and community is central to Okada's argument. His ideas come out of personal experiences with "otaku" culture. As Japanese academics have until recently been reluctant to take up the topic of otaku, these sorts of narrative accounts are all most people have to go on, and a shared cultural experience is extrapolated, or imagined, from them. The problem is not that this is presented as otaku history but that it is accepted to be the only otaku history—a history that positions older generations as "aristocrats" (*kizoku*) and "elites" (*erīto*) and dismisses younger generations. The problem I have with Okada declaring otaku officially dead is that he in effect silences them. The younger generation does not have the authority to write its own narrative. If the older generation abandons them, they are at the mercy of the mass media. This contributes to misunderstanding. Claiming there are no otaku at a time when otaku are increasingly entering the public debate effectively reduces them into an invisible presence, which can be obscured or revealed selectively.

Also, to make one's personal history into the otaku history tends to limit what experiences are included. Okada tends to omit *dōjinshi*, for instance. As a result, he overlooks an important site of creativity and community. Patterns of consumption may be broader and less focused because of the vast amounts of media and material available to otaku, but the younger generation does not differ dramatically in the intensity and duration of its activities. They are savvy at mixing media and making cultural citations. Theirs may be a different pattern of consumption and production, but it is increasingly prevalent. How do you think otaku will fare from now on?

**TL:** The otaku mode today is poised between futures. On the one hand, as the site of articulation of relations between capital and technologies, the otaku mode points to an expansion and intensification of "human capital." Human capital refers to the knowledge and skills acquired through education and experience. It was common in dominant postwar analyses of human capital, which culminate in Gary Becker's *Human Capital*, to cite the example of Japan. A nation without resources other than the skills and knowledge of its populace nevertheless succeeded due to its human capital. The emphasis on human capital is central to economic liberalism and neoliberalism. At a time when neoliberalism enjoys a certain degree of privilege, it isn't surprising that the skills acquired through the otaku mode of reception/production of technologized commodities are often seen as assets for the workplace and even as the ground for a new business model. The danger is that the otaku mode of social existence will come to mesh smoothly with the formation of new regimes of flexible labor, and the otaku's "productive modes of consumption"

will contribute to the formation of a labor pool that lends itself to retraining for new tasks as businesses change, without any economic security or social clout.

On the other hand, awareness is emerging in certain regions of the otaku experience that there is the connection between the otaku mode and labor politics—crudely put, between otaku and freeter (those who make a living stringing together part-time work) or NEET (those Not in Education, Employment or Training). Your own essay in this volume explores the emergence of the "Akihabara Liberation Demonstration," wherein otaku contest policies that limit otaku activities. More generally, the precariat movement described in Amamiya Karin's essay presents some important points of intersection with otaku modes. In other words, there are signs that, if otaku consumption is frequently seized at the level of its productivity, as human capital, then new social movements can arise within the otaku mode of social existence that take questions about flexible work and forms of immaterial labor as their ground.

**PG:** It is common to dismiss play activity among youth as escape rather than engagement, but I think that the possibilities for otaku politics deserve attention. For example, Honda Tōru called for otaku to quit "love capitalism" and find "pure love" with a two-dimensional character. He was a vocal critic of *Densha Otoko,* which he claimed was message to otaku to grow up and learn how to buy gifts for others, groom themselves and go on expensive dates, to succeed within love capitalism. Honda submitted that the capitalist system was the problem, not the guys who couldn't find dates. Whether entirely serious or not, Honda is drawing our attention to a perceived problem and encouraging debate.

In a different context, that of the Akihabara Liberation Demonstration, it is true that many participants were not explicitly aware of the motivations of the organizers. Many joined this demonstration in the spirit of *matsuri,* to have fun, to cosplay. What is more, the numbers swelled as the march continued and bystanders joined. Some commentators, such as Morikawa Kaichirō, took this to be just another example of the street performances that were popular in Akihabara at the time. For critics, Akihabara had become a media stage, and these people were playing to the cameras. They were performing otaku-ness. But I think that there is a politics to spontaneous pleasures. Whatever the motivations of participants, they succeeded in making something visible. They achieved a certain degree of solidarity, common purpose, and action. While the actual march, in the spirit of *matsuri,* did not last, it definitely had an effect. This is regardless of the causes. The radical, political potential of otaku movement might be an avenue for further research. What direction will your research take?

**TL:** In keeping with your comments about otaku politics, I feel it is important to avoid an exclusively cause-and-effect definition of political action in the context of otaku, as well as imperative conclusions of the sort "we otaku must do this or that." Often we don't exactly know why we're in the streets marching, and, even when we do, we find that our "cause" may change dramatically through the encounter, the event, and its effects. In my research on otaku, I want to find a way to trace the field of possibilities that arise around specific sets of material orientations in order to generate discussion about the ways in which power is exercised. In this respect, I tend to agree with Michel Foucault's emphasis on the politics of truth, on mechanisms of "verisdiction," because, even though we are to some extent caught up in imperatives and totalities as teachers, students, and researchers, nonetheless an ongoing exploration of what counts as truth has the virtue of leading us into fields of analysis with some sense of what matters for us.

The question of otaku for me is about the

advent of a relation to commodities based on the prolongation of media events and thus the production of worlds. The concept of *matsuri* fits such a politics well. Festival has long provided an alternative in Marxist theory to the emphasis on revolution, offering a different sense of the role of the body and performance in imagining and enacting sociohistorical change. In the instance of the Akihabara Liberation Demonstration, we might say that, if such marches, like other otaku activities, are conceived on the model of the *matsuri* event, then, even though the march did not last, it may repeat and renew itself. What would invite us to take risks to prolong such an event or world?

**PG:** We might also want to consider the potential of the *matsuri* event to open up new spaces and new notions of self and sociality. But that is a discussion that will have to wait until our next encounter. Thank you very much for a stimulating discussion.

**TL:** Thank you.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**AMAMIYA KARIN** is author of *Ikijigoku tengoku* (Living hell heaven) and *Ikisasero! Nanminka suru wakamono tachi* (Let us live! Youth and increasing displacement). She is a writer, precariat activist, and deputy representative of the Antipoverty Campaign Network (Hanhinkon Nettowāku).

**MADELINE ASHBY** is a graduate student and science fiction writer living in Toronto. Her work is available at escapingthetrunk.net and fandomresearch.org.

**JODIE BECK** is a PhD candidate at McGill University in Montreal. Her research interests include contemporary Japanese fiction, women's fiction, science fiction and fantasy, and social movements.

**CHRISTOPHER BOLTON** is associate professor of comparative and Japanese literature at Williams College. He is author of *Sublime Voices: The Fictional Science and Scientific Fiction of Abe Kōbō* and coeditor (with Istvan Csiscery-Ronay Jr. and Takayuki Tatsumi) of *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime* (Minnesota, 2007).

**IAN CONDRY** is associate professor of Japanese cultural studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A cultural anthropologist, he is author of *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization*. He is working on his second book, "The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story." He founded the MIT/Harvard Cool Japan research project, which organizes seminars, international conferences, and cultural events aimed at exploring the cultural connections, dangerous distortions, and critical potential of popular culture. His Web page is http://iancondry.com.

**MARTHA CORNOG** has written articles on manga for the sexology literature and is coeditor (with Timothy Perper) of *Graphic Novels beyond the Basics: Insights and Issues for Libraries*. She writes the graphic novel column for *Library Journal* and is preparing her next edited collection, *Mangatopia: Essays about Manga and Anime in the Modern World*.

**KATHRYN DUNLAP** is a student in the Texts and Technology PhD program at the University of Central Florida. She has been a fan of anime and manga since high school.

**GERALD FIGAL** is associate professor of Japanese cultural studies at Vanderbilt University, where he teaches Japanese history, Japanese popular culture, and anime. He is author of *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*, as well as several essays on war memorialization and tourism in Okinawa. He is working on a book about the intersection of war, peace, and tourism in postwar Okinawa.

**PATRICK W. GALBRAITH** is a PhD candidate in the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies at the University of Tokyo. His research focuses on the impact of shifts in capitalism and consumption on youth culture, specifically on otaku in Japan. He has conducted participant observation in Akihabara since 2004 and cofounded a tour of the area in 2007. He is the author of *The Otaku Encyclopedia*.

**MARC HAIRSTON,** a space physicist at the University of Texas at Dallas, turned his hobby into

a second academic career. He teaches classes about anime at the University of Texas at Dallas, is a former contributor to *Animerica* magazine, regularly participates at the Schoolgirls and Mobilesuits workshops at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and is on the editorial board of *Mechademia*.

**MARILYN IVY** teaches anthropology at Columbia University. She is the author of *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* as well as numerous articles concerning the aesthetic and affective conditions of (late) modernity in Japan and elsewhere.

**KOICHI IWABUCHI** is professor of media and cultural studies at the School of International Liberal Studies of Waseda University. His research interests include media and cultural studies, cultural globalization and transnationalism, multicultural questions, and cultural citizenship.

**PAUL JACKSON** is a freelance writer based in England. He is studying for his MA in film studies.

**FAN-YI LAM** has studied Japanese and Chinese studies at Free University of Berlin, Nihon University, and University of Tokyo. He was visiting lecturer at Free University's Institute for East Asian Studies in 2008–2009.

**THOMAS LAMARRE** is professor of East Asian studies, art history, and communications studies at McGill University. He is author of *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minnesota, 2009).

**FRENCHY LUNNING** is professor of liberal arts at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

**PAUL M. MALONE** is associate professor of German at the University of Waterloo. He is author of *Franz Kafka's "The Trial": Four Stage Adaptations* and has published on performance theory and German drama and film. His other interests include popular culture themes such as rock musicals derived from Goethe's classic *Faust*, German influences on Japanese anime, and film adaptations of the works of contemporary German queer comic book artist Ralf König.

**ANNE McKNIGHT** teaches modern Japanese literature and researches historiographies of popular culture at the University of Southern California. She is the author of *Nakagami, Japan: Buraku and the Writing of Ethnicity* (Minnesota, 2011).

**LIVIA MONNET** teaches comparative literature, Japanese cinema, film and animation theory, and gender studies at the University of Montreal. She is completing a book on moving-image installations by contemporary women artists. Her work on anime has appeared in *Japan Forum*, *Science Fiction Studies*, and in book anthologies.

**NAITŌ CHIZUKO** holds a PhD from the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. She is author of *Teikoku to ansatsu: Jenda kara miru kindai Nihon no media hensei* (Empires and assassinations: A gender studies perspective on the formation of modern Japanese media). She teaches Japanese language, literature, and gender studies at Otsuma University.

**SUSAN NAPIER** is professor of Japanese studies at Tufts University. She is author of four books, most recently *Anime from "Akira" to "Howl's Moving Castle"* and *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West*.

**KERIN OGG** is a freelance writer based in Boston. Her master's degree in film studies culminated in a thesis on the films of Kon Satoshi.

**ŌTSUKA EIJI** graduated from Tsukuba University and holds a doctorate in design. He is a

manga story writer and a professor in the School of Progressive Arts at Kobe Design University.

**TIMOTHY PERPER** has written articles on manga and anime for the sexology literature and is coeditor (with Martha Cornog) of *Graphic Novels beyond the Basics: Insights and Issues for Libraries.* He is preparing his next edited collection, *Mangatopia: Essays about Manga and Anime in the Modern World.*

**ERON RAUCH,** an artist based in Los Angeles, works extensively with subcultures such as anime, *World of Warcraft,* and role-playing games to promote critical and poetic thinking about the fractured geography of the contemporary American cultural landscape. His works range from text to photography to sprawling installations and include *Bridges of Desire,* a five-year autobiographical photodocumentary of the anime convention scene. He received his BFA in photography from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and his MFA in photography and media from the California Institute of the Arts.

**BRIAN RUH** is author of *Stray Dog of Anime: The Films of Mamoru Oshii.* He is a PhD candidate in communication.

**NATHAN SHOCKEY** is a PhD candidate in modern Japanese literature at Columbia University. He is writing a dissertation on avant-garde literature and modes of reading in the age of mass print culture and nonliterary media in 1920s–1950s Japan.

**MARC STEINBERG** is assistant professor of film studies at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema at Concordia University, Montreal. He has published essays in *Japan Forum; Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal; Parachute; Theory, Culture, and Society;* and *Journal of Visual Culture.* His book on the emergence of anime and the media mix is forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press.

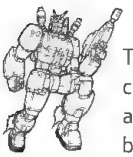
**JIN C. TOMSHINE** is a self-taught artist whose interest in manga art stems from his fascination with using simple illustrations to tell a story. His artistic style aims to create a story that complements and enhances the written word. He has a PhD in cell biology and genetics and is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, San Francisco. He finds art and science complementary: art is an outlet to express the complexities of life that cannot be explained by science alone.

**CARISSA WOLF** is a master's student in English composition and rhetoric at North Dakota State University. Her research interests include popular culture, science fiction, anime, fandom behavior, and nonterrestrial languages.

*Errata:*

In "Interview with Murase Shūkō and Satō Dai," and interview by Deborah Scally and Angela Drummond-Mathews, and edited by Marc Hairston, found in *Mechademia 4: War/Time,* the following credit was accidentally ommitted: "Translation for this interview was done by Chelsea Colin and Watanabe Yuki."

# CALL FOR PAPERS



The goal of *Mechademia* is to promote critical thinking, writing, and creative activity to bridge the current gap between professional, academic, and fan communities and discourses. This series recognizes the increasing and enriching merger in the artistic and cultural exchange between Asian and Western cultures. We seek contributions to *Mechademia* by artists and authors from a wide range of backgrounds. Contributors endeavor to write across disciplinary boundaries, presenting unique knowledge in all its sophistication but with a broad audience in mind.

The focus of *Mechademia* is manga and anime, but we do not see these as objects. Rather, their production, distribution, and reception continue to generate connective networks manifest in an expanding spiral of art, aesthetics, history, culture, and society. Our subject area extends from anime and manga into game design, fan/subcultural/conspicuous fashion, graphic design, commercial packaging, and character design as well as fan-based global practices influenced by and influencing contemporary Asian popular cultures. This list in no way exhausts the potential subjects for this series.

Manga and anime are catalysts for the emergence of networks, fan groups, and communities of knowledge fascinated by and extending the depth and influence of these works. This series intends to create new links between these different communities, to challenge the hegemonic flows of information, and to acknowledge the broader range of professional, academic, and fan communities of knowledge rather than accept their current isolation.

Our most essential goal is to produce and promote new possibilities for critical thinking: forms of writing and graphic design inside as well as outside the anime and manga communities of knowledge. We encourage authors to write across disciplinary boundaries and also to address readers in allied communities of knowledge. All writers must present cogent and rigorous work to a broader audience, which will allow *Mechademia* to connect wider interdisciplinary interests and reinforce them with stronger theoretical grounding.

Due dates for submissions for future *Mechademia* issues

**January 1, 2012** Mechademia 8: *Tezuka!*
**January 1, 2013** Mechademia 9: *Masculinities: Military and Criminal*
**January 1, 2014** Mechademia 10: *Parallel Universes, Possible Worlds, and Counterfactual Histories*

Each essay should be no longer than five thousand words and may include up to five black-and-white images. Color illustrations may be possible but require special permission from the publisher. Use the documentation style of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, Fifteenth Edition. Copyright permissions must be sought by the author. Forms will be provided by the Mechademia staff.

Submissions should be in the form of a Word document attached to an e-mail message sent to Wendy Goldberg, submissions editor of *Mechademia*, at wdgoldberg@gmail.com. *Mechademia* is published annually in the fall.

Please visit http://www.mechademia.org for more information.

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1

**PLATES 1 AND 2.** Two photographs by Alain Camporiva. Like other photographers working in this polished style, Camporiva incorporates formal elements from anime and cinema, like the motion blur seen in the first image. The cosplayers are Jules (as *Vinland Saga*'s Thornfinn), and Khamyrn and Seraphim Starr (as Riku and Xaldin from *Kingdom Hearts 2*). Photographs copyright Alain Camporiva with Idolatry Studios. Used by permission.



2





4

**PLATES 3 AND 4.** Steampunk outfits designed and constructed by Heather Luca of Scoundrelle's Keep, modeled by Jinx and Olivia Poling, and photographed by Ms. Erin Nicole for the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). From a steampunk fashion show and photo shoot held as part of the Schoolgirls and Mobile Suits conference at MCAD in 2008. Photographs copyright Erin Nicole Johnson (http://mserinnicole.com). Used by permission.



5



6

**PLATES 5 AND 6.** Two images from Erich Hoeber's series "Cosplay: Transformation and Identity." Photographs copyright Erich Hoeber (http://erichhoeber.com). Used by permission.





8

**PLATES 7 AND 8.** Sailor Moon and Sailor Mercury portraits produced by Zan, who constructs and models the costumes and takes her own photographs. Copyright the photographer. Used by permission.



9

**PLATE 9.** A portrait from Elena Dorfman's *Fandomania: Characters and Cosplay*, identified in the book as Bennett, costumed as *Tokyo Babylon*'s Tree. Photograph copyright Elena Dorfman, 2008. Used by permission.